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A Reformed Biweekly | 64th Year of Publication | January 11, 2010 | NO. 2880 | \$2.00

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JAN 19 2010

Redeeming sports: Part II in an Olympic series

Chris Steenhof

SMITHERS, B.C. – Christians can't seem to agree when it comes to the Olympics. What started as a fairly simple vision by the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, has become a complicated and controversial event. Just a brief survey of modern Olympic history illustrates this point: the murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich games, the political boycotts of both the 1980 and 1984 Summer Olympics, the drug scandals involving Canadian Ben Johnson in 1988, and the bombings during the 1996 Atlanta games.

Combine this with the massive commercialization of the Olympics and the hijacking of the games by corporate and political causes, and some Christians have given

up on the whole venture. Others criticize the perceived secular humanism of Coubertin's vision: the idea of sport being part of an effort to improve human society without God.

What's often forgotten in this type of analysis are the many positive aspects of the Olympic movement. Of course, the Olympics have been impacted by the effects of sin like every other aspect of culture, but this should not lead us to a reactionary rejection. But what aspects of the Olympics and the Olympic movement can Christians embrace?

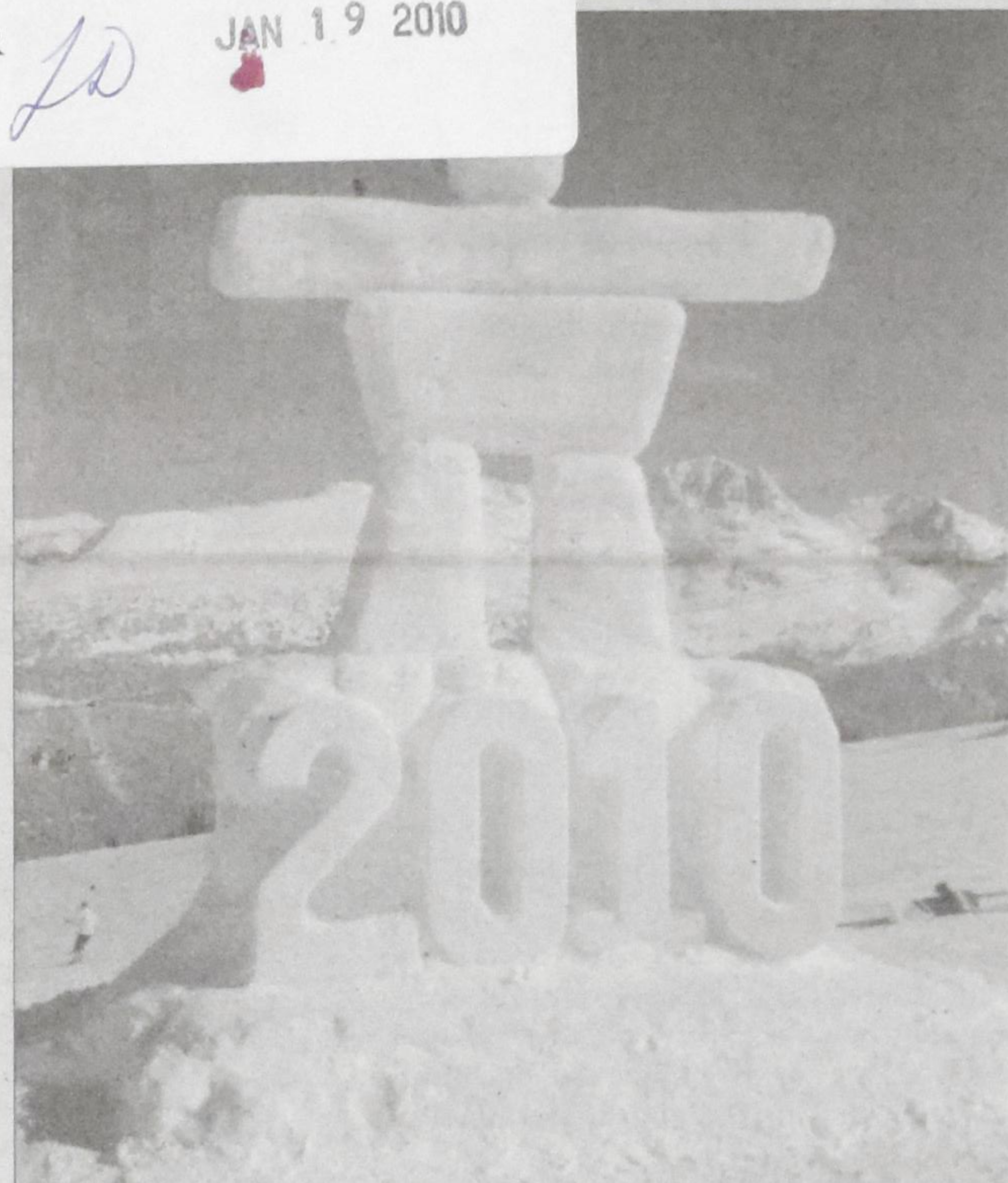
Celebrate the good

Firstly, Coubertin's vision of sport as being an important tool in the formation of human beings and in creating moral and social

strength is one that Christians can affirm. We acknowledge this by making sports an important part of our Christian school curriculum. As families we understand this by enrolling our children in community programs. Sports are a tool to teach our children important life lessons about self-sacrifice, commitment, determination, and how to deal with disappointment and defeat.

As we settle down on our couches to watch the Olympics, we can also improve our understanding of how God's grace can work for good in the lives of individuals. Who can forget watching Ian Lamaze, a Canadian equestrian, winning a gold medal at the Beijing Games in 2008? Up to that point, Lamaze's struggles with

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Remember Klassen?

Olympic speed skater and six-time Olympic medalist Cindy Klassen has joined Christian Blind Mission (cbm) as a Canadian ambassador.

"We are delighted that Cindy Klassen, who is an inspiration to us all, has agreed ... to shine the spotlight of public attention on the world's forgotten children, those with disabilities in developing countries," said Ed

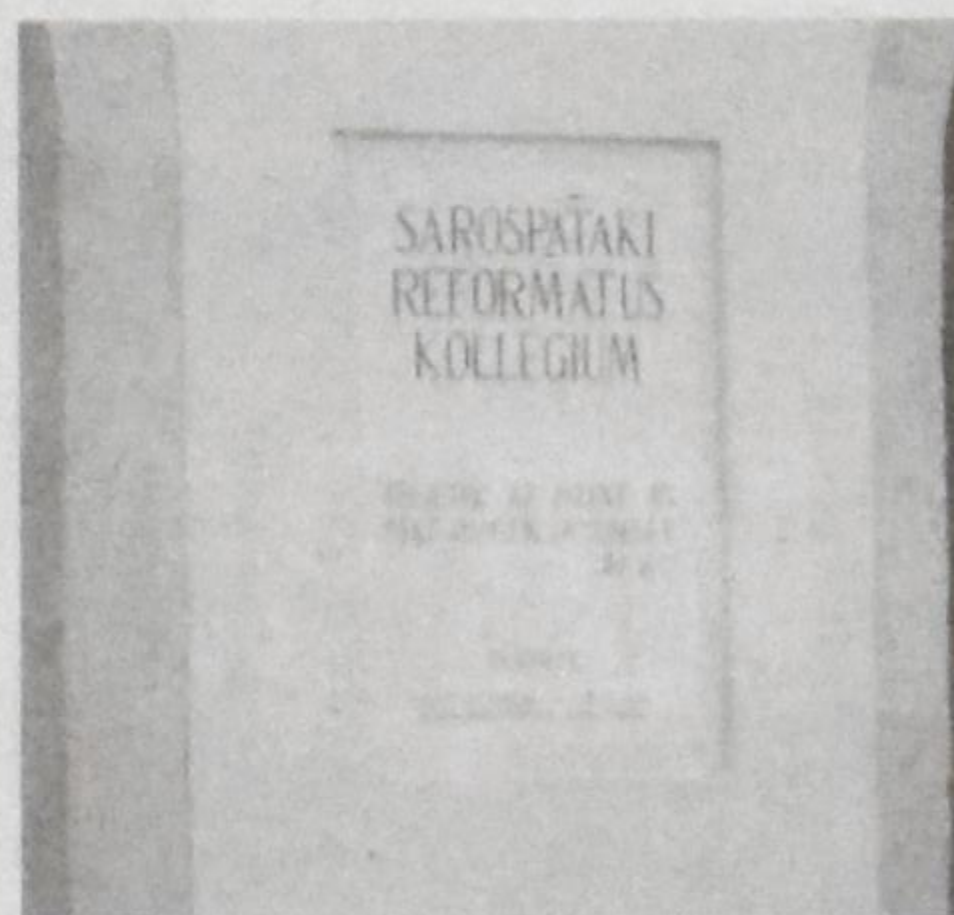
Epp, Executive Director of cbm Canada.

After a serious speed-skating accident in 2003, Cindy Klassen worked tenaciously to return to competition and go for the gold.

Klassen says, "I could have given up. But thanks to the love and support of family and friends, I didn't; I worked hard so I could compete at the highest level again and pursue my Olympic dream."

Klassen knows that not everyone is so fortunate. "Children with disabilities in the poorest countries of the world face incredible challenges; for many of them it's a matter of life and death," she says.

— Sandy Hazell



Welcome to Sarospatak Reformed Seminary.

James J. Rusthoven

SAROSPATAK, HUNGARY – On a chilly night in November of 2009, I arrived at the airport in Budapest, Hungary and was welcomed by a graying and

A Reformed community that refused to die

bearded (like myself!) friend in the faith. Frank Sawyer and I had come face-to-face at a meeting of Christian higher education professionals in the Netherlands the previous spring, 40 years after a brief encounter as undergraduates at Trinity Christian College in Chicago. In the intervening decades, our lives had taken very divergent paths, mine into medicine and subsequent practice in Canada, his into theology, church pastoring in the Netherlands, and teaching

in Central American and Central European cultural settings.

As Frank, his wife Aria, and I spoke about our work over beer and chips at the spring conference, he invited me to speak at the seminary in Hungary which he and Aria have helped to reestablish, grow, and mature in the Reformed faith over the past seventeen years. Through his recently established Institute of Philosophy, Frank has invited speakers from a variety of

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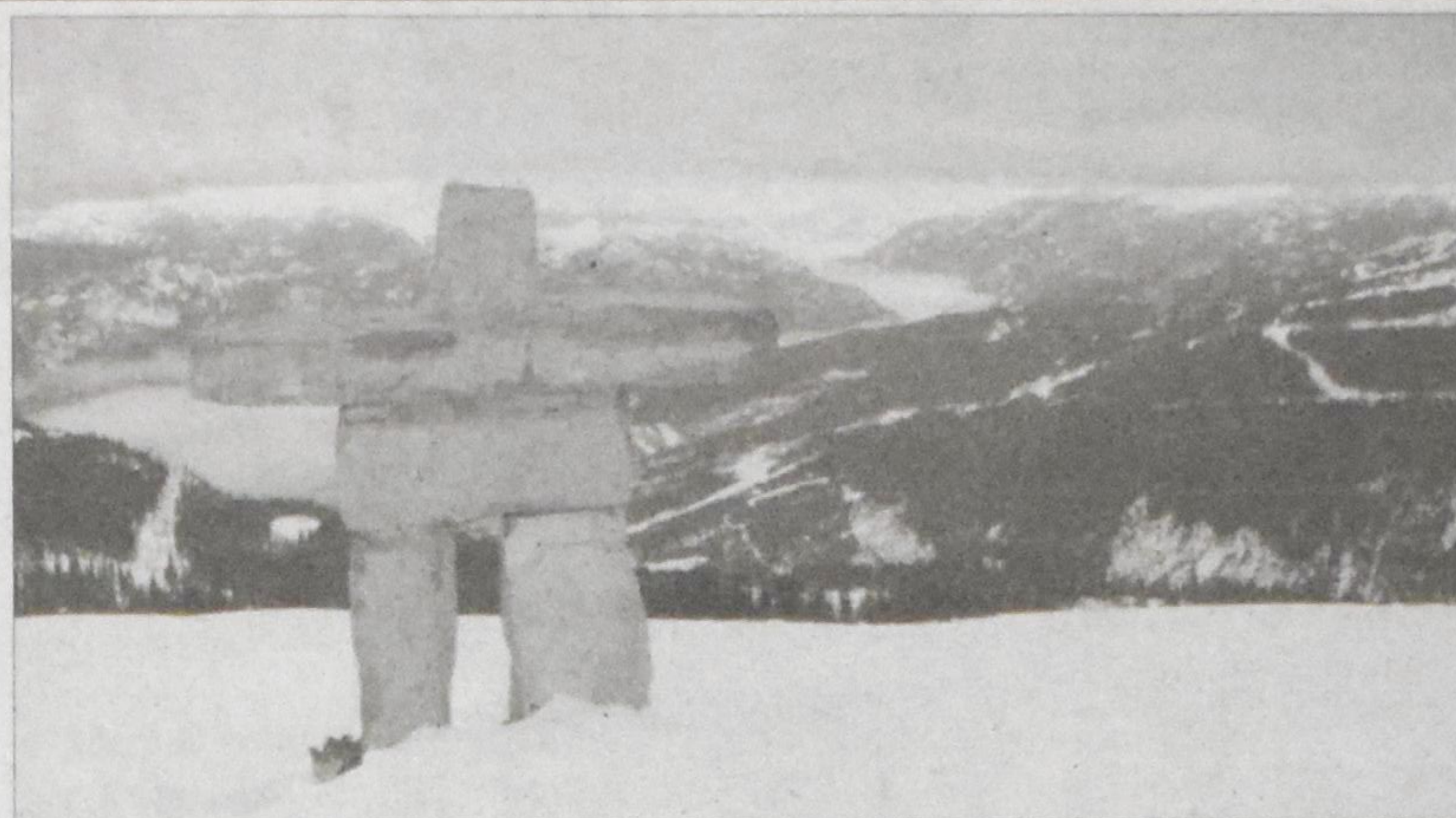
News

Olympics *continued from page 1*

drug addiction had eliminated him from all Olympic competition throughout his career. It was with legitimate pride that Canadians watched Lamaze standing on the podium receiving his gold medal. The Olympics



Dan Hamhuis



give us examples of athletes who are able to use sport to overcome tremendous personal difficulties.

The Olympics can also turn our attention away from the usual sports and athletes that dominate our attention. In Vancouver, we can watch 15 different sports, including skeleton, biathlon, and bobsleigh. These athletes commit themselves to an intense training regiment without the hope of fame or financial reward.

The Olympics can also make us aware of athletes, some of them Christian, who are using their status to make a difference for those less fortunate. Cindy Klassen, a speed

skater from Winnipeg, works tirelessly for many groups (see sidebar on p. 1).

Dan Hamhuis, a Christian professional hockey player from Smithers, BC and a hopeful for Canada's Olympic hockey team, is also very active in his community. He is currently involved in a campaign to support *Best Buddies*, an organization that helps individuals with intellectual difficulties. Many athletes use their status for altruistic purposes.

Finally, the Olympics allow us to celebrate excellence in sports. It's not a stretch to say that when we are enjoying a skater perform a triple axel, or a freestyle skier attempt

Helpful websites:

www.vancouver2010.com and www.olympic.ca are sites with great information on some of the less-publicized sports such as skeleton, biathlon, and bobsleigh, including specific competing athletes.

a Corkscrew 720, we are obeying Paul's injunction to dwell on the excellent and praiseworthy in Philippians 4:8. We worship a God who values excellence in all areas of human endeavour, including sports.

For Christians then, there is no shame in enjoying the Olympic Games. In fact, in many ways the Olympics can serve as a bit of an antidote to a steady diet of overpaid and overexposed athletes. And so, for those 17 days in February, take an opportunity to watch hard-working, often self-sacrificial athletes performing in sports that usually escape our attention. And if we do so prayerfully and thoughtfully, we can be confident that we are engaging in an activity that is indeed God-honouring.

Chris Steenhof lives in British Columbia and is a former teacher of Olympic hopeful Dan Hamhuis. The December 28 issue of CC has Part I of this series.

**Community** *continued from page 1*

of backgrounds to address topics where theology becomes real through issues and problems involving church parishioners. In my case, I was asked to share my work in discerning biblical approaches to bioethical issues

Frank and Aria began their mission work in 1982, traveling to Latin America with four small children in tow. In 1992, the intrepid couple left their three oldest children at university and with their remaining sixteen year-old headed for rural Hungary. Largely home schooled by Aria, all four children grew up living in five countries, all learning Dutch, English, and Spanish while the youngest added Hungarian to her linguistic repertoire. With *perestroika* and the dissolution of communist rule, the Reformed community in northeastern Hungary sought renewal in living life out of a biblical tradition that had developed over the previous centuries. Christian Reformed World Missions and the Sawyers took on the challenge to help them in that renewal.

Hungarian Reformation

It was a three hour car ride from Budapest to Sarospatlak, an 800-year-old town settled on a muddy (*saros*) stream (*patak*) that is the Bodrog River. The spirit of the Reformation took hold early in the 16th century but disruptive religious conflict continued in the region until the mid-17th century. Under the watchful protection of Prince Rakoczi, the Calvinist tradition took root in the 17th century. Sarospatlak's 12th century castle complex still dominates the landscape at the river's edge and can be seen on the 500 Hungarian forint banknote. The seminary



Frank and Aria Sawyer, Reformed Church (R).

itself began as a Protestant *kollégium* in 1531 at a time when the Reformed tradition began to spread throughout Hungary.

During my two day visit, I learned about struggles within the Reformed community under communist rule. The seminary had been closed and part of it converted into apartments. Part of the priceless library, with its invaluable volumes of original works of 16th and 17th century Reformers, had been quietly and inconspicuously packed up and shipped to a vault in Budapest for safe keeping. Along with the rest of society, the Reformed community became infected with the fear, deception, and loss of trust of

neighbors and even family that was endemic to the regime.

The life of the Reformed community has gradually recovered its inner spirit and its vision for Christian living, expressed in local institutions such as a Christian bookstore, primary school, and secondary school. Outreach programs serve the youth of the community as well as a large gypsy or *Roma* community, some of whom have attended the seminary. Its library is stocked with old texts from Luther, Beza, Melancthon, and others, many inscribed with their original notes.

My first presentation was given before

seminary professors and students. I chose to speak on my reflections of a Reformed Christian concept of human personhood, providing a history of its development and showing why a biblical concept can be helpful in discerning thorny ethical issues involving procreative technologies. My second presentation the following morning was on the same topic but tailored to an audience of church elders from the surrounding ecclesiastical district. This included Hungarian-speaking churches in neighboring Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania. Some came by train that morning or the previous evening for the 8 a.m. lecture.

For both presentations I was paired with a superb translator, Gabriella Rácsok, a soft-spoken PhD student who also lectures in ethics and theology at the seminary. She had attended Calvin seminary, earning her master of theology degree from there, and had even spent some warm holiday time at the home of Joanne and Vince van Dijk in Hamilton, Ontario at the invitation of fellow student Alida van Dijk. After my forty-minute talk (which became an 80-minute talk with spontaneous translation), a well-deserved coffee break was followed by another 35 minutes of questions. The hands kept flying up as the elders were clearly enthusiastic about learning more about how those in other Reformed communities incorporate their faith and theology when wrestling with ethical problems in concrete circumstances. After a leisurely early-afternoon walk around the castle grounds on a beautiful sunny autumn day, I took the train back to Budapest and then home a few days later.

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News

Mexico: Safety comes in pink taxis

Sara Miller Llana

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (CSM) – One of the first lessons a new visitor in Mexico learns, especially a woman, is this: Do not hail a cab off the street. Too often criminals posing as drivers transport passengers not to their requested destinations but to bank machines to empty out their savings.



Now Mexico has an answer, at least for women: The central city of Puebla this October unveiled a fleet of 35 bright-pink cars for women only, and Mexico City followed suit in November with plans for a similar service.

Female-only cabs are not only intended to shield women from would-be criminals but also from lewd looks and sexual passes. The idea came after Mexico City launched a new fleet of women-only buses in January 2008 that refuse men passage. The city also offers women-only space in the subway.

Mexico joins countries as far away as Lebanon and India trying to provide smoother and safer transport for female commuters, as more and more women join the workforce.

In Mexico, "pink taxis" might arrive in other cities if the program is deemed a success. But not all are in favour.

Mexican feminists, for one, have grumbled that the pink-hued vehicles, which come equipped with global-positioning systems and panic buttons, reinforce old stereotypes about women. But others have more tangible concerns. While taxi drivers have a bad rap in Mexico, they also are often victims.

Maricela Luna has been driving a taxi in Mexico City for a decade, ever since her kids grew up and she found that employers considered her too old.

"I had to look for something to employ myself," she says. She says taxi driving is a good profession for a woman, even though it can be risky (she has been robbed by passengers a few times). That's why she thinks pink cabs are a bad idea. Behind the wheel of her maroon and gold cab, she blends in.

"If you are in a pink car you stand out. They would know you are a female driver," she says.

Puebla and Mexico City will review the success of the pink taxi program in 2010.

Solomon's 'wisdom' and the law of God

Every time I read through the Bible, I notice something I had not seen before. Last year I read again the historical books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. This time something struck me that I had not noticed in previous readings. At the beginning of I Kings 3 we read that "Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father" (3:3). Shortly thereafter we read of God appearing to Solomon in a dream, asking him what he wants from God. Solomon asks him for "an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (3:9). God is pleased at this request, promising Solomon that "if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days" (3:14).

Then we read the familiar story of Solomon's judgement between two prostitutes, each of whom claimed the same baby as son (3:16-28). One had rolled over her own baby in her sleep, inadvertently suffocating him. Seeing this, she had taken the other woman's child and replaced him with the lifeless body of her own. When the other woman awoke, she knew at once what had happened, but the other woman denied it. The case came before the king, who had to decide between the two.

Possessing a deep understanding of maternal psychology, Solomon posed a test, proposing that the living child be cut in two with each half being given to each claimant. The real mother objected out of compassion for her son, and Solomon knew at once that the child was hers. The text tells us that "all Israel heard of the judgement which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice" (3:28).

Too great a reliance on himself?

What stood out for me at this most recent reading is that Solomon failed to consult the law, the



Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

Torah, before making his decision. This is not an inconsequential omission. True, by God's grace his judgement turned out to be just. But could it be that, as a result of this obviously right decision, Solomon came to take his own wisdom for granted? Might he have come to assume that he could rule wisely *without* God's law?

The text does not explicitly say this, but there are clues to this effect to come. Indeed, thereafter we read very few references at all to the law, except when the author notes that (1) David had "observed my commands and statutes" (11:34), (2) God had warned the people to keep his law (II Kings 17:13), and (3) the people had failed to do so (17:34).

Not until II Kings 22 do we find an indication that a king of Judah or Israel paid any attention to the law or even knew what it was. By the time godly Josiah came on the scene it had been long forgotten.

What had begun centuries earlier with a supremely wise king making a just decision without reference to the law had developed into a pattern of self-reliance that had become habitual. The end result was rampant evil and injustice, which had led to the destruction of the northern kingdom, a fate the southern kingdom of Judah would soon come to share.

What if Solomon had kept close to the law? What if he, like the author(s) of Psalm 119, had become steeped in the law and had learnt to love it? His example might have been passed down to his successors, who would have ruled justly. Nevertheless, despite their wickedness, God in his grace saw fit to provide through their line a Messiah, whose manifestation to the nations we celebrate at Epiphany.



David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is now blogging at: <http://firstthings.com/blogs/evangel/>.

Community continued from page 2

Frank has published many of his lectures in several books in Hungarian. He has written in various journals including a

recent one in *Christian Higher Education* and articles by both Aria and Frank have appeared in *Christian Courier*. Their ministry

also extends beyond Hungary; in St Petersburg, for example, they are encouraging a group interested in studying Kuyper and others in the neo-Calvinist tradition. At my departure, we pledged to continue contact and to find ways to establish more formal links between our two Reformed communities. I left with a sense of awe and thankfulness on hearing of the faith-testing trials through which their community of faith survived and on witnessing the abundance of blessings that such perseverance of faith has harvested.



The beautiful Reformed Seminary library.

Dr. Rusthoven is a part-time medical oncologist (cancer therapist) while working on a PhD dissertation in bioethics and theology. Jim particularly enjoys bird-watching, jogging and cycling.

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Editorials

A lifetime of days



Brett Alan Dewing
Happy New Year: 2010.

In the past decade, I have lived in Pennsylvania, New York, Ontario, Taiwan and British Columbia. I have worked for an auction house, a clothing store, a fruit stand, a Christian non-profit, a tax processing office, a music store, a high school and, of course, the *Christian Courier*. I have had three university graduations, interned at a theatre company and a ministry, been across Canada from PEI to Vancouver, visited Italy and Japan. I have taught in some capacity at eight different schools in three different countries. And yet, amidst a life of unrelenting change, I have seldom experienced the one thing it seems I have been awash in: newness.

In the last year or so, I have been recalled often to the music of Denison Witmer, a music of steady forward movement with no direction and a beautiful melancholy wonder. One of his early song titles captures my mood perfectly: "Days Repeating."

I am lost in a decade of days, stumbling around a familiar path with no better idea of where I am. Nothing builds, constructs, links. Only days repeating. Snow on snow on snow.

I feel kinship with the teacher of Ecclesiastes, crying out for meaning amid the knowledge that there is nothing new under the ever-circling sun. Nothing ever new.

Selah

If this were a psalm, the next stanza would be something to the effect of "But you, Lord, are my fortress and my strength. Your mercy never fails me. I rest in the gentleness of your abiding presence...."

That's what is so frustrating and wonderful about the psalms. Somewhere, in the space between two stanzas, the psalmist almost always undergoes some profound experience of divine perspective, and the text and mood shift. But is it too much to ask for that event to be recorded, too? Can we share in the mystery of your epiphany, sir?

This is the decade of my twenties (yes, I was born in 1980), and I find myself different at its end than I was at its start. I am more confident in my skills but less confident in their usefulness. I am perhaps less responsible because of the knowledge of my responsibilities. But the themes and patterns are the same. I feel like the children of Israel, running from captivity to captivity, handed from miracle to miracle, and yet stubbornly retreading their age-old cycles of sin and idolatry.

Knowing the new

So what have I learned in the white spaces, off stage, off page, between the stanzas? Well, there is "behold, I make all things new" and "behold, I am doing a new thing."

Maybe the secret is the "behold." Don't look for it; behold it. Be. Hold. Be held.

Because, really, I am still of the same dust. All that is change and growth, all that is new, is not me. It is, in fact, the things under the sun that are never new. But most things are, if you will, above the sun. And in that supersolar world, all is newness.

But I am caught in between the stanzas. I am in the death and the resurrection. And, of course,

I have a hard time reconciling them. It is a new experience. No matter how long I labour under the yoke of this dual dueling identity, the mystery of it all is still novel.

And so I can enter my thirties confident in the truth of my new man, though he may be for a time continually buried under the old. And to tell you the truth, I have experienced the new. Hardly a month goes by without God blindsiding me with some dazzling newness of his nature. And through the dialogue of creature and Creator, I am made new, a little at a time. Even when my circumstances don't change – or never stop changing.

And I am reminded again of the words of Annie Dillard. She urges her readers and herself to strive for a "lifetime of days," a life of ever-present, ever-now newness. And that's the kind of day I wouldn't mind repeating.

Toddler theology



Angela Reitsma Bick

Faith flagging a little? Hang around some kids. If you're not raising your own children right now, you can always teach Sunday school to get jolted out of spiritual cruise-control, to turn familiar answers upside-down or to see original sin in living colour. If you're shy when it comes to talking about your faith, children can come in handy then too. They're not going to stare at the style of your new haircut; they'll just ask you what happens when someone dies one minute before a request for more play-dough. And if you're getting bogged down in the hair-splitting arguments on doctrine that crowd congregational meetings and bookstore shelves, then a bit of toddler theology is just what you need: simple and profound. Here are a few things that kids have taught me.

1. God made the universe; let's move on. I love how preschoolers will accept that God made us, and we belong to him – enough said. Here's a backyard conversation I was lucky enough to overhear:

3 year-old girl: God made everything you know.

2 year-old boy: The rocks?

Girl: Everything.

Boy: Did he make those rocks?

Girl: Yup.

Boy: Did he make those rocks there too?

Girl: We talked about this already. God made EVERYTHING!

Boy: Oh. (pause) Let's play soccer.

2. We can't know God fully. Our family has worked through a few different children's Bibles. Zonderkidz's cartoon version depicts the usual image of Jesus, smiling and brown-haired. God, however, is pictorially absent. The only exception is chapter one, where a stylized hand holds a brightly glowing earth.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," we read after dinner.

"Where is God?" our two-year-old wants to know.

"That's God's hand, honey. He's right there."

But she remains unimpressed. "Where is the REST of God? I want to see his face!"

You're not the only one sweetheart, I think. You're not the only one.

3. Giving feels good. I taught a grade five catechism class once – a tough crowd. After sitting through church, these kids were not interested in another lesson, no matter how attractively packaged by Faith Alive Resources. They were, however, galvanized by action. We organized a sock drive, and the students showed more enthusiasm than they had all year. In a few weeks, we had 275 pairs of new socks for the homeless shelter downtown. A few of the same girls began another sock drive through GEMS this past Christmas, which was three years later.

4. God hears us. You'll have to forgive me for this, but sometimes I'm more conscious of the people listening to me pray than I am of the God who created me to pray. I know that God is always there, and that he hears prayers and even the "groans that words cannot express," but it's hard to keep that in mind all the time.

One day, as we sat down for lunch, I started a prayer with "Thank you God for..." and then rushed through a long list. After "amen," but before I could pick up my bagel, a little voice piped up with "God says, 'You're welcome!'"

It was a relief to hear that God was as polite as we'd been trying to make our children, but even better to be reminded that God has an ever-faithful ear, tuned to the things that matter to us.

In 1679, Jacobus Koelman published a Reformed treatise called *The Duties of Parents*. He does not mince words about the urgency for parents to kill their children's corrupt nature, for "even the dearest child is a 'misshapen' creature who must be born again." I agree with his emphasis that parents have a very solemn duty to benefit their children spiritually. Koelman admonishes parents to "care for Christian children and to shape their souls toward knowledge of their Maker and a holy Christian lifestyle," and my husband and I promised to do that when our daughters were baptized. But Koelman doesn't leave much room for grace to sneak in and reverse the roles now and then. Kids can be insightful too, or can push us towards insight. And in a world that often clamours and confuses, I'm happy to gather all the revelation I can.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent bimonthly that seeks to: report on significant events in the Christian community and the rest of the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and rooted in a reformed perspective; provide contact for the Christian community.

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Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canada

Letters

Those amazing generations

The immigrants of the 1950s and '60s ... they came by the boat-fuls. Now many of them are no longer with us. They moved on to their eternal reward. They were remarkable people who faced daunting challenges. They worked hard. They came with a vision, expressed that vision and gave it shape; they toiled for it, and they sacrificed for it. Their energetic initiatives were amazing. And they saw the beginning of the fruits of their work. Their work was richly rewarded. Churches, schools, institutions and organizations, and their very way of life, are with us today, a testimony to their vision and industry.

But there are richer rewards. Those immigrants, in spite of their limitations,

continue among us in their children and grandchildren. Those new generations are Canadian. Are they Christian Canadians? Many are. Do they carry on the vision of their parents? Many do. Are they as devout as their parents in walking with the Lord? Many are. Did they give the spirituality of their parents a fresh expression? Yes, many did. Are they concerned about the coming of the Kingdom in all of life? Many are.

These children and grandchildren are highly privileged – they have resources that were beyond the reach of their parents and grandparents. Many are well educated and highly skilled. They are mostly modest and thoughtful, hard working and sophisticated,

idealistic with a touch of class, ambitious without losing sight of a broader responsibility, discerning new needs and challenges of which a previous generation had been unaware.

From these people the *Christian Courier* attracted a new generation of writers. Their articles are written in a fresh style, well researched, often surprisingly original. These young writers are well educated – they know history, they know society, and they have cultural sensitivity. And, mostly, they come with an honest awareness of faith. Many among them are leaders in their fields, more will follow. They have greatly enhanced the quality of *CC*.

So we see their names attached to articles in the *Christian Courier*, and we recognize in them their parents, their people, their generations: Nicolai, Reitsma, Vandergrift, Gerritsma, De Moor, Feddema, Van Staalduinen, Groenewegen, Dykema, Van Harmelen, Rang, Schuurman, Groen,

Steenhof, Hoogendam, Kramer, De Graaf, Vander Werf, Dykstra, Brouwer, Kerssies, Den Hartog, Van Hove, Bosch, Vander Veen, Eikelboom, Alkema, Kooy, Vander Galien, Hoekstra, Warkentin, Den Boer, VanderVennen, Siebenga, Vander Slikke and many, many more.

As one representative of those older generations, I read their thoughts, their ideas, their observations, their advice and suggestions. And I say, glad that you wrote, glad that you told us, glad that you are here, glad that you brought honor to your parents, to your people, to your communities, to the Kingdom. And I thank God for you.

(I must quickly add that the communities referred to above profited also greatly from the valuable contributions of Christian writers and leaders from a wide variety of ethnic origins. Perhaps some modest research could lead to an article expressing due appreciation for their contributions.)

Louis M. Tamminga
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Once in Royal David's city

I was so moved by the piece on the people who must live within the wall around Bethlehem (December 14 *CC*). One of my colleagues (Wafaa Hasan) is Palestinian, and through her I have become aware of the reality of this wall, and the lives her relatives there must live. She has traveled to the West Bank twice since we've met, and her experience of the check points has been "unbelievable": even for someone privileged with a Canadian passport. Thank you for printing that.

I hope people going on "holy land" tours start agitating for their dollars to be spent in a way that benefits the people who actually live in Bethlehem, as well as for a tour that doesn't treat Bethlehem as a museum piece, but reveals the lives of those who still live there, only this time under a Herod who goes by another name...."

Agnes Kramer-Hamstra
Hamilton ON

A Calvinist eats and breathes the kingdom

You asked the question, "What does it mean to be a Calvinist?" (*CC* September 14). This question does not have an easy answer. It could be an inheritance, that some of us were born with. It could be part of our culture – a certain identity with which we feel comfortable. It could mean being Dutch, as my husband used to say, in the same breath as "a people with deep pockets and short arms." ["But look at all the Christians institutions the Dutch have built!"] That is another conversation.

What does it mean to be a Calvinist? you ask. You are a living example of what it means to be a Calvinist, Mr. Witvoet,

working to enhance the kingdom of God, to live a meaningful existence, even beyond the so called retirement years. God bless you.

To be a Calvinist is to eat and breathe your daily tasks out of a Christ-centered mentality, whether it be in politics, foreign affairs, taking care of the sick, wiping runny noses, teaching a classroom full of kids, or producing food for the people.

This may be a simple version, but, then, I am a simple person.

Yes I am proud to say that I am a Calvinist. And the older I am the more thankful I have become.

Nienke Ysselstein Izurieta
Allentown, Pennsylvania

Don't lose your heritage!

Further to Bert Witvoet's November 23 editorial "What is your GPS for life?" – I find that his analysis of not consciously working with a world-and-life view (or trying to do so without one) is correct and may, God forbid, become prophetic. The unique contributions made by the Reformed Christian community to Canadian society would not have come about without the tenacious, sometimes even stubborn, adherence to the Reformed Christian world-and-life view. I'm thinking here of Christian education initiatives and institutions at all levels, and of organizations such as the Christian Labour Association of Canada, the Christian Farmers Federation, and the Committee for Justice and Liberty.

Those Christian educators who no longer value or teach that world-and-life view and no longer show how Christians can be meaningfully engaged in society fail to realize that this distinctly Reformed view has been the inspirational and financial backbone of the Christian school system as we know it. Without that world-and-life view there would be no Christian elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions, and to abandon that worldview would mean the imminent demise of those programs. Nor will other Christian social action initiatives spawned by that vision fare well.

Wake up, Reformed Christians, before it is too late. The mainstream brand of North-American evangelical thinking and living do not create the initiatives or the tools with which Christians can engage our secular culture and society.

Ed Grootenboer
Waterloo, Ontario



Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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Subscriptions:

Canada (G.S.T. incl.) and USA

Overseas

one yr. (24 issues) \$48.00
two yrs. (48 issues) \$90.00

\$100

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Wednesday, 9 a.m. (12 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site www.christiancourier.ca for more details. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838

e-mail: Advertising: ads@christiancourier.ca

Subscriptions: subscriptions@christiancourier.ca

PRINTED IN CANADA



Columns

How do urbanites perceive farmers?

Ever notice on television shows and in movies how the exciting people are always in cushy jobs where they wear nice clothes and drive fancy vehicles? If they happen to show people who work in factories or are plumbers, carpenters or farmers, they are either incredibly boring or very unhappy in their work. They are victims of a modern-society stereotype that implies that those who work with their hands are semi-literate second-class citizens.

I was thinking about that the other day when I watched a rerun of the "Royal Canadian Air Farce." The comedy show had a skit of the comedians being farmers and talking about mad cow disease. The supposed farm couple was dressed in outrageous looking overalls and rubber boots. They talked like imbeciles. It wasn't funny. BSE is not a laughing matter. Farmers are still dealing with the aftermath of those few infected Canadian cows.

Plumbers get a bad rap. Read the comic strip Blondie, and you'll see what I mean. The plumber that comes to Dagwood and Blondie's house is sloppily dressed in overalls, a big cap and wears oversized work boots. Carpenters and construction workers are usually shown wearing a hard hat and work clothes, and they have a dour look on their face. Factory workers get no respect at all. They carry a lunch box and they never smile as they walk to the plant.

A student who attends law school or becomes a banker

or stockbroker is more likely to be considered successful by his peers than a student who becomes a mechanic or works on the family farm.

In society's viewpoint my job as a newspaper columnist might be considered high-tech and even glamorous to some. Churning out these weekly and monthly columns from home, people might even think I'm a smart and happy fellow – and smartly dressed while sitting at the computer. But do people think the same thing when they see me as a farmer on the loader tractor dumping buckets of manure into the manure spreader, or when I'm wearing rubber boots feeding cattle, or greasing machinery. Probably not!

Air Farce description

How do young urbanites see farmers? What comes to mind when you say the word "farmer"? I asked young adults in their early 20s (relatives and friends) who live, go to university, or work in cities like Ottawa, Toronto, Georgetown and Halifax. One works on a cruise ship that sails around the world, currently on holidays. Don't think of me when you're giving the description, I said.

A female attending university in Halifax said a farmer in her mind would be wearing coveralls; he'd be on a John Deere tractor and would be chewing on a straw or stem of grass. The young woman working on a cruise ship said

farmers are important and they are hardworking. She sees them in overalls, a plaid shirt with a piece of hay or straw in their mouth. My niece and her friend said the initial thought is overalls. The city gals said, "plaid print and overalls."

A just-graduated dental hygienist in Ottawa was blunt. A hick, she said.

Other interesting observations include work long hours; no holidays; work seven days a week; big hands and big feet; work all the time but farmers eat incredible good wholesome foods; they have great tans.

It looks like the young folks watched Air Farce. That's how they see us.

I asked a buddy of mine who works in agriculture marketing how urban folks perceive farmers. Has it changed from the days he wore bib overalls and squinted beneath his hat's dirty brim, chewing on a stem of grass?

He laughed and said farmers are looked at as being better off than they claim to be. They are known to be honest, hardworking and fairly high-tech. And not that poor.

Good! No Air Farce stuff!

Maynard van der Galien farms in the Ottawa Valley at Renfrew, Ontario. He wears lined thick coveralls on the farm in winter. No long johns!



Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

The relatively short history of computer technology has brought numerous changes, many of which were difficult to predict. The first computers emerged as rudimentary mechanical computing "engines" developed by Charles Babbage and other pioneers in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. These early computers were comprised of gears and camshafts and sometimes powered by steam. The event of the Second World War spurred a flurry of development, and computers advanced into large electronic machines, assembled by using thousands of primitive vacuum tubes.

One famous computer was the top-secret "Colossus" machine developed in Britain to help decode enemy military communications that were encrypted using the German enigma machine. Later, the invention of the transistor in Bell labs in the late 1940s enabled the replacement of expensive and inefficient vacuum tubes with smaller, more reliable and lower-cost transistors. Transistor technology paved the way for the invention of the "integrated circuit" in the 1960s, which allowed numerous transistors to be manufactured on a single silicon chip. This development led to dramatic decreases in cost and increasingly powerful circuits.

Giant strides

In 1971 the Intel 4004 became the first microprocessor on a single chip, comprising over 2300 transistors (about the same number as the number of vacuum tubes used in the Colossus). By 1975, the first "personal computer" kit, the MITS Altair 8800, was made available to hobbyists. Microsoft's very first product was a programming language for this early microcomputer called Altair BASIC.

Over the following decades, transistor counts have continued to advance at an exponential pace with current

microprocessors now possessing transistor counts in the billions. In fact, an observation called "Moore's Law" has predicted that the number of transistors on integrated circuits has approximately doubled every 18 months. In the words of Michael Rothschild: "Since the computer-on-a-chip was invented in 1971, the cost of computing has plunged 10 million-fold. That's like being able to buy a new Boeing 747 for the price of a large pizza."

Computers have now become ubiquitous – they are not just on our desktops anymore. "Embedded computers" can be found in automobiles, televisions, coffee makers, stoves, robots, copiers, cell phones, thermostats and in a plethora of other "smart appliances" that increasingly surround us.

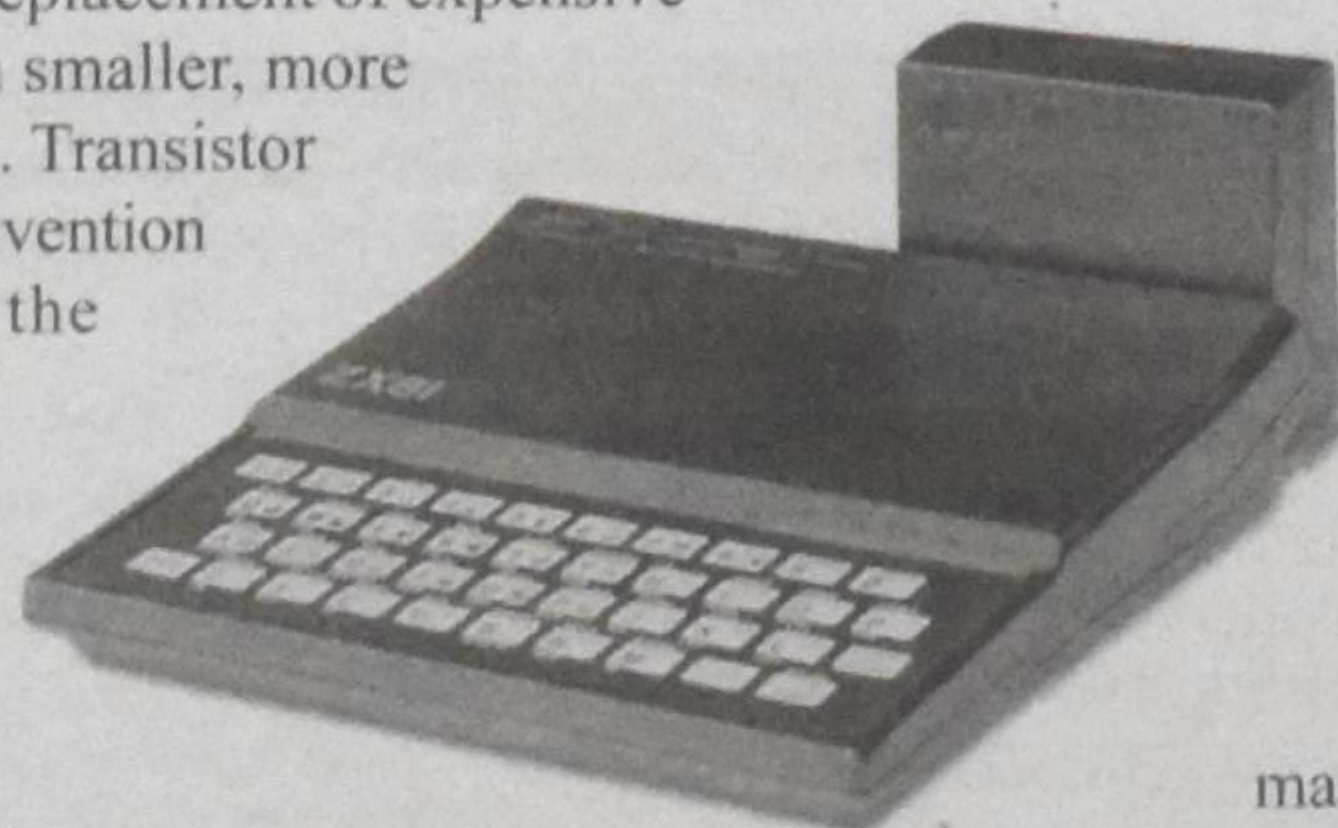
Brimming with possibilities

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, I wonder about what new technologies will emerge or are just around the corner.

Some famous predictions from the past now appear humorous, such as the one from "Popular Mechanics" in March 1949, which made the bold prediction that "Computers in the future may ... only weigh 1.5 tons."

Predictions such as this one illustrate how wrong even the most technically astute people have been. More recently, it was difficult to foresee the emergence of the worldwide web and the widespread changes it has brought. Trying to predict the direction or consequences of how technology will unfold is clearly difficult. Even those on the vanguard of new technology have trouble seeing the road ahead. In the words of Yogi Berra, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."

Nevertheless, the development of technology is not



A Sinclair ZX-81

new. Already in the beginning, in Genesis 4, we read of tent-making, establishing livestock, building instruments, and the forging of tools and metal working. God created the world full of possibilities for amazing and wonderful things. What makes our times more challenging is that recent developments have been occurring at a dizzying pace.

Some new technologies do not make the world a better place; just because we can do things does not mean we ought to do them. Other new technologies show some redeeming qualities. I think of examples like green power that can reduce our impact on the environment and medical advances that can help people who suffer from illnesses.

Limits of technology

However, despite the continuing explosive growth of technology, we must acknowledge its limitations. In his book *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it this way:

"Technology does make possible advance toward shalom; progress in mastery of the world can bring shalom nearer. But the limits of technology must also be acknowledged: technology is entirely incapable of bringing about shalom between ourselves and God, and it is only scarcely capable of bringing about the love of self and neighbour."

Perhaps this will be the year of Christ's return, when shalom will be complete. In the meantime, we are called to use and develop technology responsibly in ways that help us respond to God's call to take care of the earth and its creatures and to show love to our neighbour.

Dr. Derek Schuurman is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. Derek and his wife Carina have 4 children and they live in Hamilton. His personal history of computing began with his first personal computer: a Sinclair ZX-81.



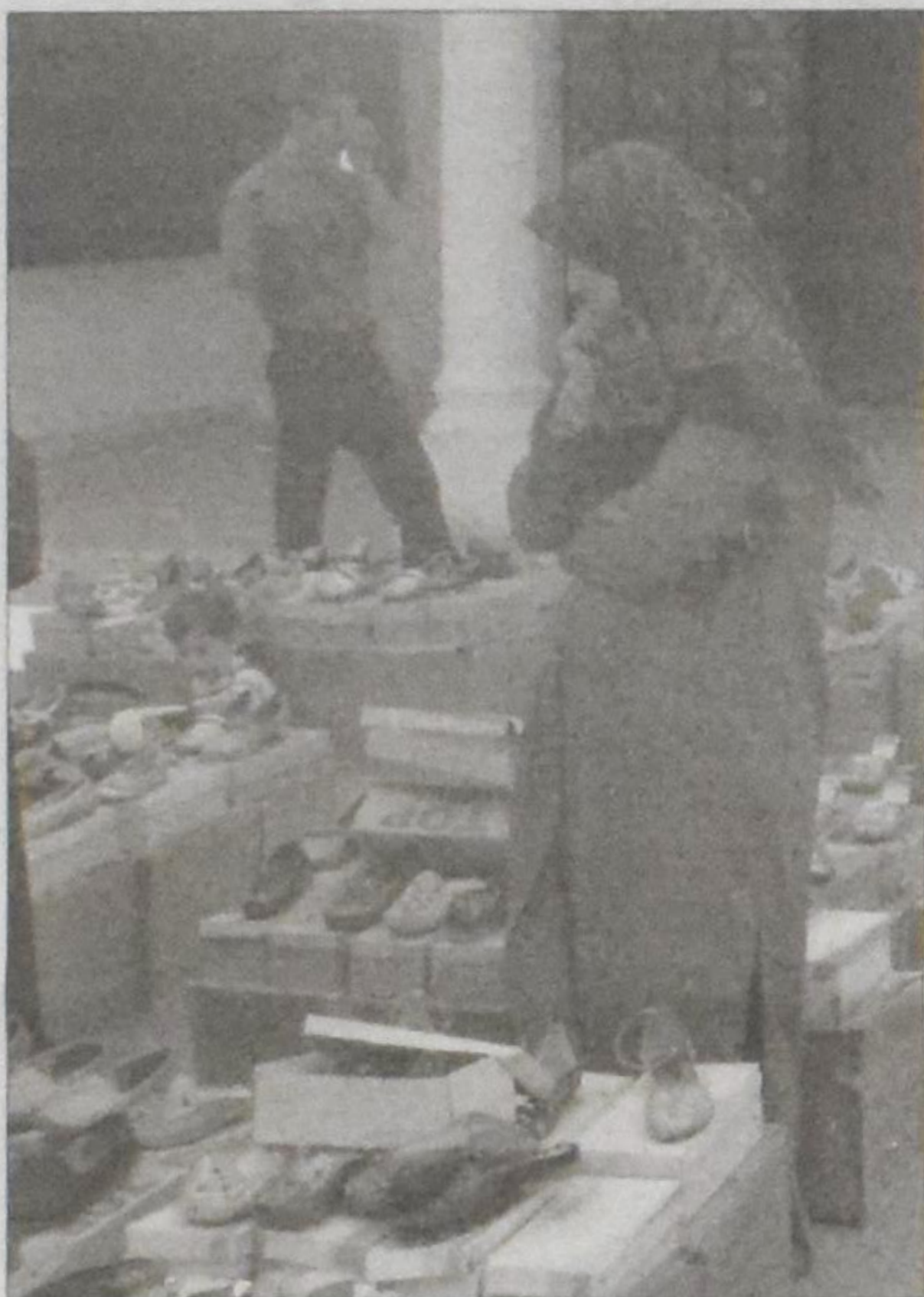
News

Welcome to Lebanon, land of surprises

Dustin Biel

"There are groups in this country that would kidnap a foreigner."

After only ten days in Lebanon, my host destroyed the sense of security I had settled into. So far, I had traveled around the southern half of Lebanon, blissfully unaware that I could be a target for certain extremist groups. Although I was in Hezbollah territory, my host was referring not to Hezbollah, but to Sunni extremists. Hezbollah is a Shiite political party/militia, and it does not like trouble in its Southern Lebanon heartland. Sunni radicals are trouble. A single Canadian tourist whose entire knowledge of Arabic consisted of "hi,"



Stall at Monday market in Nabatieh.

"thank you," and "no" is not trouble.

I usually save the trouble for later, however, and first tell people the fun parts about Lebanon, all the reasons for going to Lebanon in the first place: cedar trees, Roman ruins, Crusader castles, Mediterranean sunsets. During my six-week stay in Southern Lebanon, I watched the sunset from the roof every evening I could. On a clear evening, you can see the sun go down between the hills and watch its light reflect off the sea in a blazing gold that fades into burnished bronze. The peace of the evening settles on the hills like the dust that often obscures the distant horizon. As the sun sinks, the evening calls to prayer echo from the villages scattered among the hills, and because of the loudspeakers on the mosques' tall minarets, the tinny calls carry far.

A study in contrasts

Provided that the Israelis are not bombing the country into rubble, late spring and early summer is the time to visit Lebanon. You will probably need a few weeks to simply absorb the complexity that is Lebanon. Contrast is everywhere. Brand new BMWs and Honda CRV SUVs share the road with rusted Renaults and old Toyota trucks. Pink oleanders blossom amid the rough white rock and innumerable thistles. New supermarkets flanked by Starbucks, the Body Shop and McDonald's are a short walk from empty, blast-scarred

hotels. Drive not ten minutes from the yellow stone mosque in Sidon, and you'll find weed-covered ruins with only a canvas tent sheltering parts of a battered mosaic. Billboards in Beirut advertise jeans and cigarettes and Victoria's Secret with beautiful women dressed up (or down) according to Western fashion. But drive an hour south of Beirut and most women dress modestly, covering their hair with headscarves. Lebanon defies neat definition.

The southern hills are ruggedly beautiful, rough and rocky, and the people manage to thrive there. They grow olives and lemons, and plant terraced wheat and corn fields on slopes where no Western farmer would dare bring machinery.

Wherever village and field and orchard are not, weeds and rocks and scrub are. The rocks are invariably white and the weeds are invariably ugly. On the sides of the narrow paved roads that curve through the hills, herds of goats graze on the weeds and the small bushes. There are many goats, and even more weeds. Far to the south, the weeds can even become deadly.

In 2006, the Israeli military carpeted much of the far south with little cluster bomblets, and many thousands remain concealed by rocks and four-foot high thistles. Billboards warn of the danger with pictures of the common bomblets.

"Stay on the road," said my host as we drove farther south. The roads are safe; the hills are not.

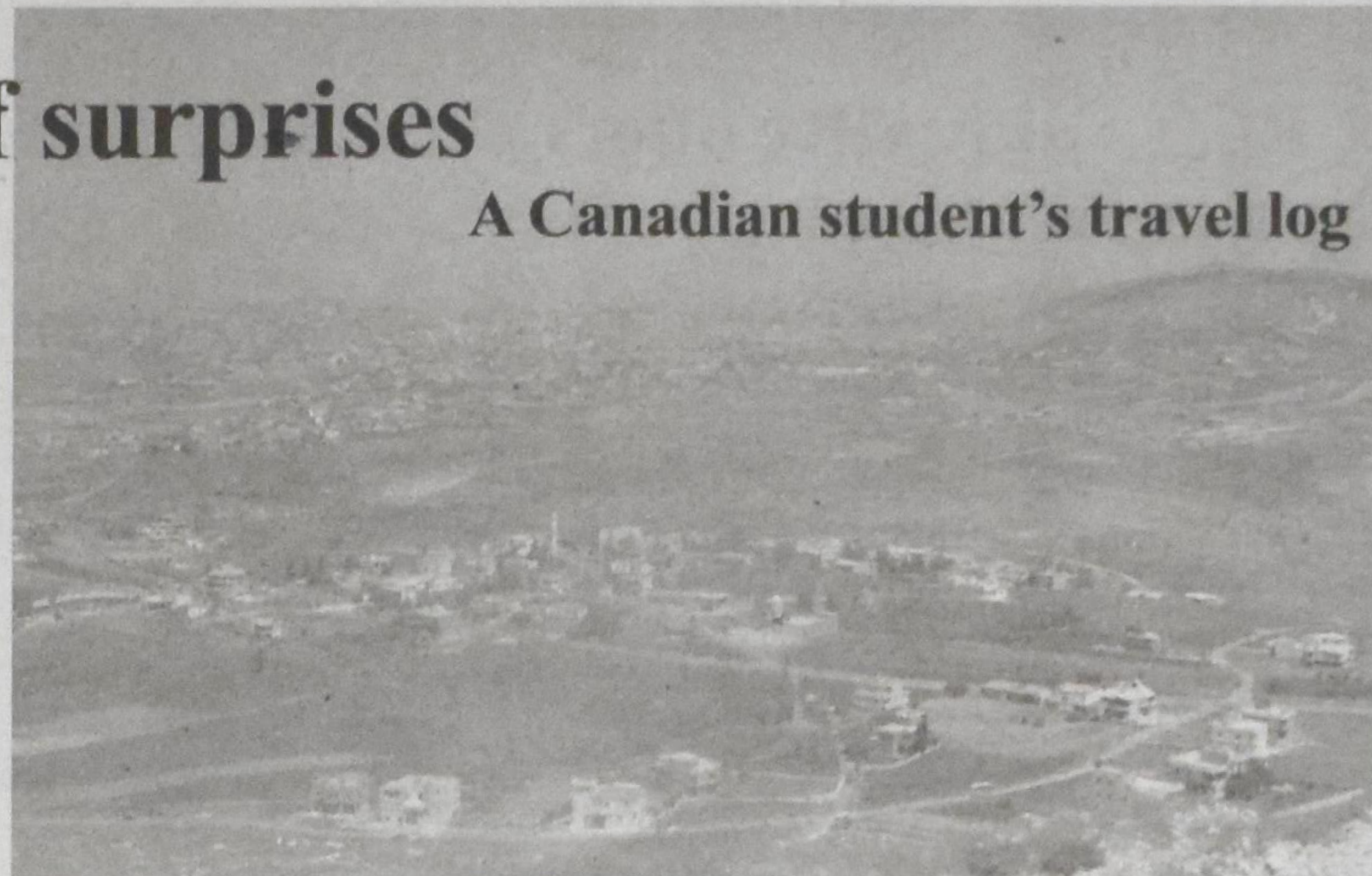


Near Tyre, a billboard warns of bomblets.

Proceed with caution

The weeds are not the only explosive side of Lebanon. It is impossible to ignore the politics in the southern villages. Power poles adorned with the flags of Hezbollah and Amal – the two main political parties in the Shia Muslim south – line the roads. People put pictures of their favourite leaders on houses, shops, and the back windows of their cars. Billboards and posters of martyrs are common, and Hassan Nasrallah's face – the leader of Hezbollah – is everywhere. The market in the city of Nabatieh has stands selling t-shirts and key chains with his photo, and he is pictured on both the billboards memorializing those

A Canadian student's travel log



The view from Beaufort Castle in southern Lebanon.

who died fighting Israel, and the innocent civilians who died in Israeli bombings. Deep in the south you can find destroyed Israeli tanks from the last war (in 2006) adorned with the green and yellow Hezbollah flag.

With Hezbollah in the south, the extremists in Palestinian camps near Sidon, Beirut and Tripoli, and the usual political disputes between the Christians, Sunnis and Shiites in Beirut, life was never boring while I was there. North American politics are dull by comparison.

Danger and confusing politics are not the only attractions that Lebanon offers, of course. Up north in the mountains stand thousand-year-old cedars; in Tyre, in the far south, Roman ruins are scattered throughout the city; in the Bekaa valley the immense remnants of the Roman temples of Jupiter and Mercury bake in the sun. Visit Sidon and its old Crusader castle built on a small island in the Mediterranean, or look around for the little known ruins, like the Phoenician Temple of Echmoun.

To go off the beaten path, you will need someone who knows the area, and speaks Arabic. You can get by with English and French in Beirut, but you need Arabic to talk to most of the people in the rest of the country. Ironically, English is everywhere, even where few speak it. In tiny village shops in the south, you can find Mars bars, Pert Plus shampoo, and Nescafé coffee, all labeled in English with Arabic in small print below the English. The West's influence extends even to small hill villages that rarely ever see a foreigner.

Living with tension

Tradition still governs most of Lebanese life in the south, in attitude and practice. My friends knew an auto-body repair man named Ali. Every time we drove by his shop, we would stop and see if he was in. He would boil tea or coffee in a little metal pot on a propane camp stove, and pour it into small glasses not much larger than a shot glass. Drink the coffee slowly if you don't want a mouthful of the grounds that settle at the bottom of the cup. People who liked sweet coffee put a tiny scoop of sugar in their coffee. I would stir in three.

Wherever I went, I drew little attention. Even in the south, where I was probably the only blond, white guy in town, people rarely

looked twice. I was surprised by people's casual indifference to the foreigner wandering around, but I didn't mind. Indifference can be comforting in foreign places. Once my ignorance of the danger I was in was stripped away, indifference was a source of great comfort. Living in fear is no way to live, and I couldn't enjoy Lebanon if I feared there was a terrorist around every corner. It is difficult to know at what point healthy caution turns into paranoia. The friends I stayed with knew the culture, and I trusted their judgment. When they told me we were going to Beirut/Tyre/South/North that day, I pulled on my boots.



Hassan Nasrallah in rear window.

The relaxed attitude towards life rises from several sources, including the threat of violence. You cannot predict what will happen tomorrow, so why make plans for next week? When you don't know if Israel will send a smart bomb through your kitchen window, or if a car bomb will kill another politician in Beirut, caution replaces confidence. You don't panic because something is happening somewhere. Something is always happening. While I was there, the current something was unrest in the Palestinian camps near Sidon and Tripoli, a bomb in Beirut, and political protests at the government buildings. What else can you do but take life as it comes and act accordingly? In Lebanon, plans are never absolute. So toss that itinerary before you visit, and don't stray into the weeds.

Dustin Biel is studying English at Dordt College. He is from Lacombe, Alberta.



Church

CRC's Faith Alive offers hymns for the ages

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) — They knew that "Amazing Grace" would make the cut, and that "How Great Thou Art" was a sure thing. The committee that chose the 250 hymns for *Hymns for Worship* considered these songs "classical hymns," says Calvin music professor Bert Polman. *Hymns for Worship* is put out by the Christian Reformed Church's publishing arm, Faith Alive.

They are "hymn texts from olden time to modern times," elaborated Polman, a member of the committee and co-editor of *Hymns for Worship*. They are "hymn



Bert Polman, co-editor.

texts that have appeared in most hymnals and are still in use today."

The hymnal also includes modern hymns that will no doubt become classics. "In Christ Alone," at seven years old, one of the younger inclusions in the new collection, "In Christ Alone" is a fabulous piece," Polman asserts. "It has gotten popular in the last five years for very good reasons."

Besides the new hymnal's breadth — it contains classics, psalms, canticles, and contemporary worship songs — what makes it distinctive is that its songs are listed chronologically. "The order of the book follows the early Christian church, the medieval church, the Protestant tradition, the rise of Methodism, the Oxford movement, the Great Awakening, the rise of the black church in the United States, and so on," Polman explains.

This musical walk through church history is intentional because *Hymns for Worship* was designed to serve as more than a hymnal. The collection is also a textbook for courses in hymnology, church history and even systematic theology. "In systematics you're dealing with doctrines, and hymns tend to be a lay person's theology text," he says. "What we believe, we tend to sing." ✕

Christian photographers to pay fine

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico (CNA) — Attorneys for a small photography company charged with violating anti-discrimination laws for declining to photograph a lesbian "commitment ceremony" are planning to appeal a New Mexico judge's decision to uphold the New Mexico Civil Rights Commission's ruling against them.

The Albuquerque company, Elane Photography, is co-owned by Elaine Huguenin and her husband, Jon. They are being represented by attorneys from the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), a Christian not-for-legal alliance which "defends the right to hear and speak the Truth through strategy, training, funding, and litigation."

In 2006 a woman named Vanessa Willock asked Elane Photography to photograph a "commitment ceremony" that she and another woman wanted to hold in Taos, New Mexico. New Mexico state law does not recognize homosexual unions.

Elaine Huguenin declined because her Christian beliefs, and her husband's, conflict with the message communicated by the ceremony, the ADF says. Willock filed a complaint with the New Mexico Human Rights Commission, accusing Elane Photography of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Forcing choice between faith and livelihood

The commission held a one-day trial and issued an order in April 2008 finding that the company engaged in discrimination prohibited under state law. The commission ordered the company to pay Willock \$6,638 in attorneys' fees.

"Christians in the marketplace should not be subject to predatory legal attacks for simply abiding by their beliefs," says ADF senior counsel Jordan Lorence. "The [U.S.] Constitution prohibits the state



Elane Huguenin

from forcing unwilling artists to promote a message they disagree with and thereby violate their conscience. Should the government force a videographer who is an animal rights activist to create a video promoting hunting and taxidermy?"

This is the same type of serious incongruity.

"American small business owners do not surrender their constitutional rights at the marketplace gate, nor can the government make people choose between their faith and their livelihood," he continued.

Lorence charged that the commission's decision showed a "striking disregard" for the company's rights. He said the decision will now be brought to the New Mexico Court of Appeals. ✕

Militant Hindus attack Christian fair

BHOPAL, India (UCAN) — An attack on a Christian fair in Madhya Pradesh a few days before Christmas spread panic among Christians in the state, says an organizer of the event.

Militants chanting Hindu slogans and invoking the names of their gods torched representations of biblical scenes at the fair in the town of Gwalior on Dec. 20. The police arrested one of four men they named in connection with the incident.



Father Anand Muttungal

The group evoked the names of Hindu deities and started damaging the biblical artworks depicting scenes from the life of Christ, said fair coordinator Raju Francis. Francis, a Catholic, told UCA News that local Christians had held the two-day fair before Christmas for eight years on public

land near a market.

This year, "everything went well on the first day," he said. On the second day, the militants not only trashed the fair but sent panic through the Christian community in the state, he added.

Government turns blind eye

Archbishop Leo Cornelio of Bhopal said the attack was "a matter of serious concern for Christians," especially when they were preparing to celebrate Christmas. Cornelio sent a three-member fact finding team to Gwalior, headed by Father Anand Muttungal, spokesperson of the Catholic Church in the state. The archbishop asked the team to submit its report quickly. He said that, in turn, he would in turn submit the report to the state government and seek protection for Christians and their institutions, especially during Christmas Eve midnight Masses.

Christians form less than one percent of the state's population and have experienced sporadic violence since the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in December 2003.

Archbishop Cornelio told UCA News it is the government's duty to protect its citizens from attacks. He noted that the morale of anti-Christian groups is "very high," as the state government seldom takes action against them. ✕

Worship at your own peril

(CWN) — Nearly 70 percent of the world's people live in countries that restrict religious liberty, according to a study by the Pew Forum. The Pew survey found restraints on religious expression in 64 countries, including some of the world's most populous nations.

The Pew study reported that believers have the most difficult time when a country's government and society both impose limits on religious freedom, such as in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran. "But government policies and social hostilities do not always move in tandem. Vietnam and China, for instance, have high government restrictions on religion but are in the moderate or low range when it comes to social hostilities. Nigeria and Bangladesh follow the opposite pattern: high in social hostilities but moderate in terms of government actions."

North Korea is agreed to be the most repressive society on earth, including repression of faith expressions. But because it is so closed, specific data is impossible to obtain. Beyond that, Northern Africa and the Middle East are the regions where religious freedom is most heavily circumscribed, the Pew study found; the Americas allow the greatest degree of religious liberty.



The survey encountered high degrees of both government regulation and popular hostility to religious minorities in countries such as Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and India. The large countries with low levels of both regulation and public hostility were Brazil, Japan, the United States, Canada, Italy,

South Africa and the United Kingdom — though the UK is increasingly preventing Christians from overtly expressing their faith in their workplaces. ✕

Education

January series to focus on cultural diversity

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – If the modern North American church wants to grow into the future, it better be prepared to have a vision for cultural diversity. That's the message pastor and author Soong-Chan Rah will deliver as part of Calvin College's annual "January Series" of lectures this year. Rah's lecture on January 18 will be based in part on his recent book, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (IVP, 2009). The January Series runs from the 6th to 27th, and will be available via the Internet and at 28 remote sites across North America.

The presentation to be made by Soong-Chan Rah is especially relevant to Christian Reformed Home Missions, because many of the agency's new church plants serve multicultural North American communities and are staffed by ethnically diverse pastors. Additionally, Home Missions has four ethnic leadership teams that seek to provide leadership to Hispanic, Black, Korean, and Native American church communities in the CRC.

Soong-Chan Rah is a pastor, theologian, and sometimes controversial thinker who has called attention to racism and cultural insensitivity in the North American evangelical community. He is currently the Milton B. Engebretson Associate Professor of Church Growth & Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. Prior to that, he was senior pastor of the Cambridge Community Fellowship Church, a multi-ethnic, urban, post-modern generation church in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

A range of topics

Additionally in the series, on January 13 the Calvin Academy for Lifelong Learning will sponsor a talk by James K.A. Smith who will speak on "Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation."

Other speakers will address such topics as global health care, "Green Prosperity" and an "African Solution to African Problems." Richard De Vos, Sr., co-founder of the Amway Corp., will be featured on Wednesday, January 20, in a talk called "Ten Phrases." His focus will be on the use of words and how they can impact a person's attitude and help to create a positive (or negative) outlook on life.

The final speaker for the series will be Archbishop Elias Chacour, a church official from the Melkite Catholic Church in the Middle East. His talk – "Unity Within Diversity: Myth or Reality?" – is being sponsored by The Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. For more information on the series, visit www.calvin.edu/seminary.

Philanthropist supports Christian education

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC/CRCNA) – While the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto has just announced a \$4 million grant from the estate of former Archer Daniels Midland president Lowell Andreas, Dordt College is busy sorting through how to best use the gift of nearly four million dollars that it received last month from the philanthropist. Andreas died April 4 at the age of 87.

The Andreas gift is the largest in the college's history, according to John Baas, vice president for college advancement. He noted, "The impact of a multi-million dollar contribution goes far beyond the bottom line. This bequest is a tremendous encouragement to all of us at Dordt College and also to those whom we serve."

ICS, the other recipient of Andreas' generosity, is also a non-denominational Christian graduate school in Toronto, begun by, and well-known to, Christian Reformed Church members in Canada. As it does with Dordt, the CRC recommends it to members for financial support. A number of CRC pastors, teachers and leaders have attended or taught at the ICS. Andreas' gift will enhance priorities

fundamental to the mission of ICS, including faculty and student support, information and research resources.

Those who knew Lowell Andreas say he was a quiet, gentle, unassuming man,



Lowell Andreas, philanthropist.

a devoted Christian, and well-loved by his family. He was born in Lisbon, Iowa, in 1922. He attended the University of Iowa,

where he majored in philosophy, and then served in the U.S. Army during World War II. After an honorable discharge, he returned to the family turkey feed business and became a loss adjuster for the family-owned turkey insurance company.

In 1947, Lowell and a brother, Dwayne, purchased a soybean plant in Mankato, Minnesota, which became known as Honeymead. In the mid 1960s they sold their business and chartered the National City Bank of Minneapolis. A few years later they were offered the opportunity to invest in and provide management for the Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM). Andreas later became ADM's president. He continued to serve ADM as director emeritus after his retirement in 1973.

Besides giving to Dordt and the Institute for Christian Studies, Lowell Andreas and his wife, Pamela, donated many millions of dollars to other groups over the years, including Westminster Seminary, Covenant College, Minnesota State University, Immanuel St. Joseph-Mayo Health System and charities and foundations.

Teacher's offer of prayer considered 'bullying'

SOMERSET, UK — Last month, a Christian teacher in Britain was sacked from her job after offering to pray for a sick pupil during a home tutoring visit. Olive Jones says she was made to feel like a criminal for sharing her faith, and that "this is yet another example of Christians being persecuted because of political correctness."

The Christian Legal Centre, which is backing Jones' case, blames the "heavy-handed so-called equalities agenda that discriminates against Christians."

The 54-year-old mother of two, who taught math to children too ill to attend school, said she mentioned prayer during a tutoring session with one of her pupils. She said her bosses had decided that her comments about faith could be seen as "bullying" and dismissed her from her role at Oak Hill Short Stay School and Tuition Service in Somerset. Jones, a teacher with 20 years experience, now fears she may never work again.

During one session with the pupil, the child said she did not feel well enough for the lesson so she stayed in one of the bedrooms while Mrs Jones chatted with the girl's mother. Olive Jones raised the topic of her faith, saying she believed God had saved her life after an ordeal as a teenager.

Unknown to her, the girl's mother lodged a complaint, but the authorities did not inform Jones of any criticism. It was not

until after her next visit when she once again referred to her belief in God that she was brought before her bosses for questioning and dismissed from her post. Since Jones worked only twelve hours a week and had no formal contract, her job at the school ended immediately.

'We do not believe'

During this last session Jones said she had told the pupil and the pupil's mother that there were people praying for them, and then she asked the child if she could pray for her.



British teacher Olive Jones.

She said the girl looked at her mother, who said "We come from a family who do not believe" and so Jones did not pray.

She says, "I asked the mother if she wanted me to cancel the next lesson as her daughter had not been feeling up to maths, but

she said no." Jones said she left the lesson on good terms but within hours she was summoned to see the head of the school who told her that sharing her faith with a child could be considered as bullying, and so she was consequently fired. She says she was "devastated" and that the decision was "completely disproportionate."

"It is like a black mark against my name and character when it comes to getting a reference for another job, just because I shared my testimony – as if I committed a criminal act," she says.

Christianity a no-go area

Olive Jones attends her local Church of England parish. "My main concern is the interpretation of the policies concerned, which seem very ambiguous," she notes. "It is as if my freedom of speech is being restricted. I feel I am being persecuted for speaking about my faith in a country that is supposed to be Christian. I feel if I had spoken about almost any other topic I would have been fine but Christianity is seen as a no-go area.... It is like a bad dream that had come true," she said.

Critics say the case echoes that of nurse Caroline Petrie, who was suspended a year ago in December for offering to pray for a patient. Petrie, who coincidentally lives near Jones and has been Jones's friend for some years, was later reinstated after a national outcry.

Andrea Williams, Director of the Christian Legal Centre, commented: "The story of Olive Jones is sadly becoming all too familiar in this country. It is the result of a heavy-handed so-called 'equalities agenda' that discriminates against Christians and seeks to eliminate Christian expression from the public square. Olive Jones had compassion for her pupil and finds herself without a job because she expressed the hope that comes with faith. It is time for a common sense approach to be restored in all these matters."

Prayer

What is Christian spirituality?

Bill Steele

What is permissible in Christian spirituality is controversial. Some maintain that mystical practices such as using the Jesus Prayer, speaking in tongues, listening prayer and receiving words of knowledge are unacceptable. Others maintain that it is the theological or doctrinal understanding of the practice that makes it acceptable or otherwise.

Measures of discernment

I suggest that there are a number of criteria for the acceptability of a spiritual practice. A spiritual practice should be accepted if

1. it rises out of gratitude for the salvation that Christ has accomplished for us by his atoning death, and is not to gain any kind of merit with God or to make God love us more;
2. it is based on and uses the Scriptures;
3. it is Trinitarian, that is it is communion with God the Father by the mediation of God the Son and rises out of the fullness of the Holy Spirit;
4. it includes Sabbath,
5. it is at times communal and at times individual and private;
6. it has a sacramental element;
7. it involves fasting;
8. it is an aspect of the whole of the life of the believer, his or her morality and evangelical obedience to God in Christ.

Learning from history

How have Christian fathers in the past defined and discerned Christian spiritual practice?

John Calvin says, "Not only does [God] cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us."

(The Institutes III.2.24) and "... the essentials of prayer are set in the mind and heart, or rather that prayer itself is properly an emotion of the heart within, which is poured out and laid open before God, the searcher of hearts." (The Institutes III.20.29)

So for Calvin Christian spirituality is something that develops in us, has an emotional aspect and is relational.

Prayer is perhaps the linchpin of Christian spirituality, but prayer must have spiritual integrity. The Lutheran theologian Martha Ellen Stortz reports that, "The Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith identifies three ways in which practices from other traditions may be integrated into Christian prayer: as psychophysical preparation for prayer; as a technique for generating greater spiritual experience; and as a competing religious reality. It advises Roman Catholics to limit the use of these techniques to psychophysical preparation, lest they violate the integrity of Christian prayer."

In other words, we may find other traditions of Christianity offer ways of preparing our body and mind for prayer. This is one good way to discern the good of a spiritual practice: if it prepares us for a deeper experience of God through the practices with which we are familiar. It is wise advice that Protestants would do well to follow.

Four pillars of prayer

The Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.") has entered Protestant spirituality from the Eastern Orthodox Church. Is it scriptural? Certainly, it should not be used as an empty mantra of vain repetition, but may it be used as a sincere prayer to Christ and as an entry into communion with the Father through Christ in the fullness of the Holy Spirit? May silence and speaking in tongues also be used when language is insufficient to express the depth of one's passion for God? I suggest that the answer is yes.

In the history of the Church, prayer has been reckoned

to have four pillars: *lectio divina*, or spiritual reading; *meditatio*, or meditation; *oratio*, or thanksgiving, petition, silence and awe; and *contemplatio*, or contemplation.

Lectio divina of Scripture is the art of reading Scripture with a listening heart. Scripture was written to be listened to. Most of the original hearers could not read, so they listened to a reader read the Scriptures. We need to be taught to listen to Scripture in accordance with the type of literature passage it is. The gospels are good news. How do we listen to them as good news for us? The epistles are letters written to churches or individuals to address specific situations in the churches or in the life of those individuals at a particular time in the history of Redemption. How do we hear the letters address our particular situations in life? Many of the Old Testament books are prophecies written to record messages from God to particular people at particular times in the history of Salvation. How do we hear them prophesy to us in our situations in our time?

Meditatio is said by Father Vincent Dwyer of the Center for Human Development at Notre Dame University to be, "Merely a presence, a presence which from listening brought about reflection, to the point that when you listen, infallibly you reflect. It just flows." He says that "*Oratio* was really when you reflected and then found yourself moving towards prayer of petition, prayer of thanksgiving, silence, awe, anything that would move you. It was the ability to allow oneself to move from reflection. And infallibly the Spirit would move you." He says that "*Contemplatio* was a direct and natural sequential development of having listened. And it was receiving the gifts of the Spirit and being able to taste and to know what it is to operate under the Spirit's influence, which in the old days we called the gifts of the Holy Spirit." Thus contemplation is the spread of the spirituality that is concentrated in *lectio divina*, *oratio*, and *meditatio* into the rest of life.

Tips for refining spirituality

Help may be had from literature. Don Postma's *Space for God* is an excellent resource for improving one's meditative and prayer life. I have used it with great effect in a small group in a church where I served as pastor. Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* is another helpful resource.

Foster outlines the following practises: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. These spiritual practises, however, may not be reduced to a program. How could the God who freely loves us and freely chose us to be conformed to image of his Son be programmed?

Christian spirituality is based on religious beliefs. So also is any other kind of spirituality. There is no spirituality without religion. When we reduce religion to going to church (how can one go to church?), engaging in empty rituals and holding doctrines without the engagement of the heart, then we may have religion without spirituality. Religion is life. Christian religion is life as response to God's Word. It has moments of concentrated spirituality in worship, prayer, hearing God's Word, and celebrating the sacraments. It is personal and individual, and it is communal.

Bill Steele grew up in Scotland, studied at Westminster Theological Seminary and Knox College, served as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, then as a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, and as Missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions in Guinea, West Africa. He is seeking a call to serve as a Pastor in the CRC.

Talent

Stanley J. Groothof

Teeth clenching his pencil, one hand is hovering the bass range of the grand piano's keyboard while the other is carefully clasping the upper right corner of the sheet of music on the music rack. Stephen is staring at the music, carefully, painstakingly handwritten. A bead of perspiration forms on his forehead.

It is half past supper dishes and quarter to bedtime. It is a precious moment of peace and passion.

Nearly rhythmically, the pencil moves from his mouth into his hand. It stands poised, millimetres away from the paper, ready to add a note, or adjust the key, or change the tempo, or perhaps even scratch the entire measure. Any addition, correction or deletion is weighted with purpose. Twelve pages of music scattered around the piano prove it. He has been working on this in free moments for as many years. It is complex. This is Stephen's opus.

Pencil lead suddenly makes decisive contact with his composition. Stephen tightens his grip, prepared to translate the full orchestra in his mind into the language of staves and notes on his paper.

And the telephone rings.

The pencil lowers without leaving a mark. Stephen reaches for the Talk button. His pastor's call is punctual if not painfully predictable. The voice on the line is cordial, maddeningly grateful; it is hard for Stephen to be angry with the interruption.

"Numbers 287, 135, 547, 512 and 288, please." The hymns for Sunday's service.

Phone call over, Stephen rubs his eyes with the thumb and index finger of his left hand. The other hand still holds the pencil, filled with unknown potential, having just jotted down hymn numbers.

Sheet music is gathered up again and carefully placed in the black folder. The pencil now neatly rests on top of it. It must wait for another day, or, more likely, another week or another month.

The notes in the hymnal are large, the melodies simple. Stephen practices, but certainly not out of necessity.

He is looking forward to Sunday morning.

Stanley J. Groothof is a husband, dad, friend and pastor in Telkwa, BC. He blogs at 4thpoint.wordpress.com.



Prayer

Does God answer prayer?

John Murray

Many people will face the future with trepidation. None of us is aware of what the New Year holds. One of the greatest blessings for Christians is that we do not face the future alone. Our father has promised to be with us at all times and calls us to share with him our fears, our heartaches, our concerns and those impossible situations to which we see no answer. Prayer is often the only answer, as it was for the church in Romania while suffering for their faith.

In 1974, Romania was in the vice-grip of its dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu. The people lived in fear. Secret police were everywhere just waiting to pounce on anyone out of line. Even friends became informants. The Church was under heavy scrutiny, was severely restricted and openly opposed. It was under these circumstances that a few women from Emmanuel Baptist Church in Oradea, northwest Romania, felt the urge to pray for their country on a regular basis. They requested the use of a room at the church and decided that very early in the morning was the best time – 5:30 a.m.

This handful of women began their prayer vigil and consistently met at that time to pray for their country and the Church. It was not long before others heard and wanted to join in. Soon the room was not big enough, so a larger room was allocated. This was followed by the need to use a larger room, and then another, and another, until only the sanctuary was left in which to meet. What began as five women meeting together finished with over 500 people meeting each morning to pray specifically for change to come about in their country of Romania. On Saturday the number would swell to 900.

It took 15 years

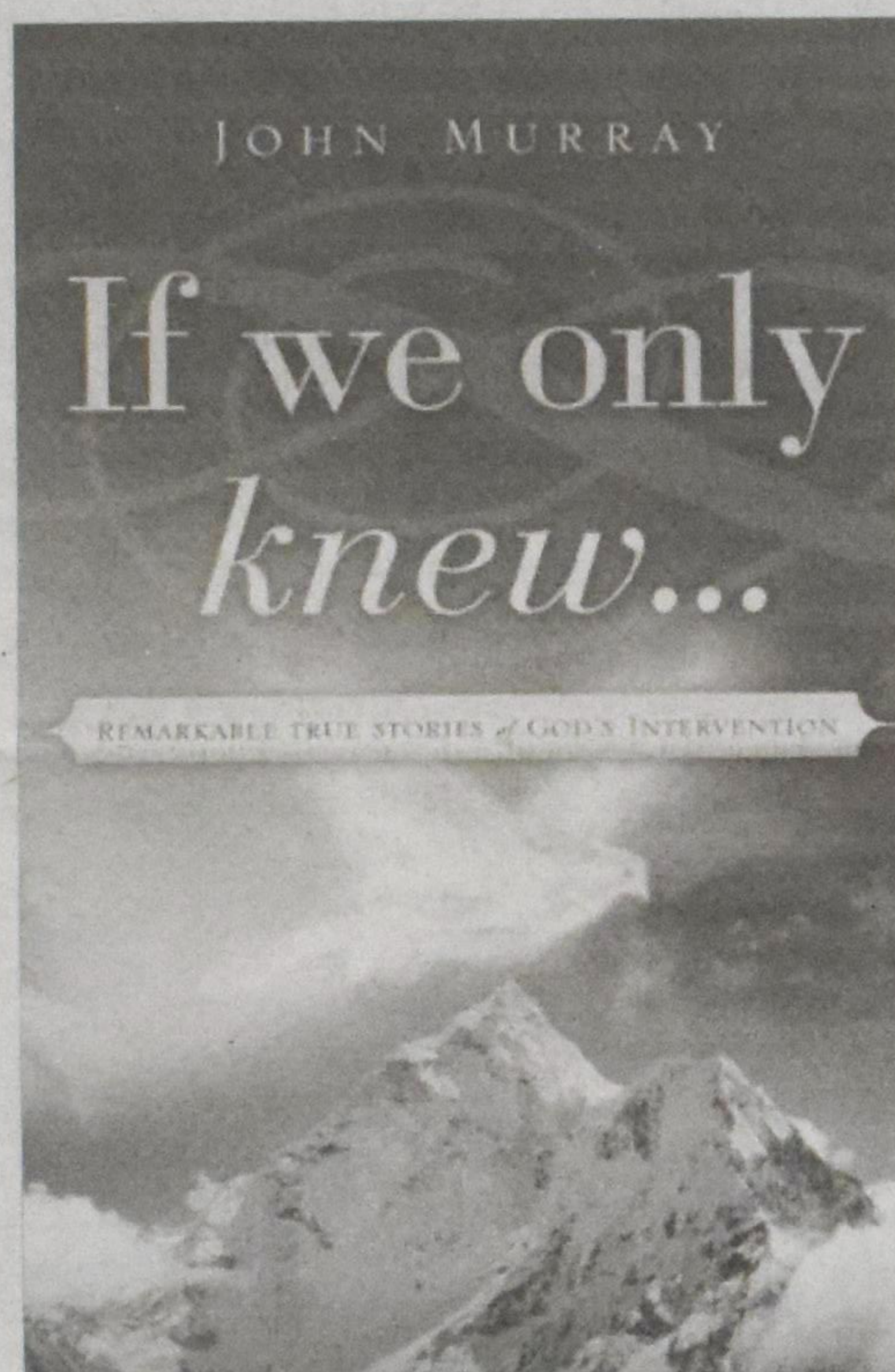
The amazing aspect about this story is not that the prayer meeting occurred early each morning, or the increasing number of people who flocked to the church to pray before they went to work, but that this prayer meeting went on every day for 15 years before they began to see answers to their prayers. While under heavy persecution, they prayed that the time would come when the Church would be able to worship freely and be allowed to openly share the gospel. They prayed that evangelistic meetings would be held in cultural halls and that Bibles would be plentiful and allowed to be distributed. All of this would have been absolutely impossible at that time – impossible even to imagine.

It was not until 1989 that the communist governments of Eastern Europe began to crumble. One by one – East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary – they all rapidly fell like a house of cards, releasing their people from 40 years of communist oppression. In Romania the dictator

Ceausescu and his wife Elena were executed by their own soldiers on Christmas Day 1989. Freedom came to the Church.

The very things that the people had prayed for came about. The gospel was allowed to be openly preached on the streets, even to the holding of evangelistic crusades in soccer stadiums. Bibles were freely distributed and Christian literature was available for all.

How many of us in the West would have continued to pray for 15 years with requests that appeared so incredibly impossible?



It had to be a God-given vision for them to even bring to mind the possibility of seeing such a vast change in their country. God answered prayer and rewarded their faithfulness. Although having received the answers to prayer, they continued the prayer meeting for many years.

What is prayer?

Prayer is not trying to persuade God, or trying to force his hand. It is simply being a vessel available to implement the decisions that God has already made to fulfill his plan and purpose on earth. This is ironic, considering that God does not need our help. He is sovereign and totally self-sufficient, yet he calls upon his children to pray.

Prayer can be very specific. For many years, a friend of ours prayed concerning the whereabouts of her children. Her estranged husband had taken them abroad, and she was unable to find them. For this, she felt she could never forgive him. However, she never lost the desire to know where they were, and she continued in prayer to that

end. Years later, after hearing a sermon on forgiveness, she realized that she needed to extend forgiveness to her husband. Within days of doing so, she miraculously learned where her daughter was living. She had a remarkable and joyous reunion with her daughter, and ultimately with her son.

There are times we would love to see the hand of God distinctly involved as we go through the day. The reality is that we have no idea how many times God intervenes on our behalf, protects and provides for us. We see God's hand at work retrospectively.

Just like in the "Footprints in the Sand" poem, we see only one set of footprints in the sand at the times of crisis and stress in our lives. We discover that those were the times when God was carrying us.

Does God always answer prayer?

There are times when our prayers are not answered, or at least certainly answered not in the way we would like them to be. There are places in Scripture where answers to prayers were not forthcoming, or did not come quickly. Paul's experience with his "thorn in the flesh" is one example: he definitely did not receive the answer to prayer that he had in mind. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). There was Daniel also, whose prayer was answered immediately, but it took three weeks before he received the answer (Daniel 10). His answer was delayed by demonic powers.

There are other reasons for unanswered prayer. James suggests prayerlessness and selfish intentions may be the problem. He states, "You do not have, because you do not ask

God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives" (James 4:2-3). Obviously we cannot see God's answers to prayer if we do not pray. But when we do pray, what are our motives? Are those motives ultimately for the glory of God, or are we seeking answers only for our own benefit?



It is easy to say that "God knows best," but that is little comfort for those going through a serious loss or heartache. It is true that many lessons have been learned because God did not answer our prayer, but there are times when we have no option but to yield to the sovereignty of God. We yield to his greater knowledge and understanding. We think we know best and know what would be best for us, but we have to admit that there have been many times when that has not been so. Sometimes we experience untold concern and stress when adverse events happen and doors close on us, only to find that God eventually overcomes the situation or simply opens another door.

As we approach the New Year with its uncertainties we can enjoy confidence in a God who hears the prayers of his children. We can take comfort and consolation from the fact that, even when we do not immediately see the answer to our prayer, we can still trust God implicitly. God has already been where we are, and he promises to be there with us always. One day we will understand why some of our prayers were answered, while seemingly others were not. We bow to God's authority and defer to his wisdom in all things and in all situations. We must rest in the assurance that he really does know best.



This article is an adaptation of the chapter on prayer from the book *If we only knew...* Remarkable True Stories of God's Intervention by John Murray. Information on the book can be found at www.jmurray.ca.

The nature of prayer

Prayer is like the communication between a father and child. The child sees the father working in the garden and asks: "Can I help?" The father has already planned what is to be done in the garden but wants his young child to have a part in its accomplishment. The father first hands the child the hoe with instructions to take out the weeds; he does the same with the rake and then shows where and how to put the plants in. The father had the plan, but the child is pleased to be used in laying out the garden and appreciates the ultimate result of a flowered garden. Without the father's help the child could do very little, but by being open to instructions, the child plays a significant role in achieving the plan of the father. Thus it is with us. We offer ourselves through prayer to our Father that we might be used in fulfilling his will in the garden of this world.

Family

From Toddlers to Teens

by Denise Dykstra



God's Christmas surprise

Denise Dykstra

Over the last few weeks many of us have heard a number of different Christmas stories. We've watched the Grinch as he tried to steal Christmas, and followed Ebenezer Scrooge on his journey towards redemption. We've cried with George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, and sang about Frosty the Snowman and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. We've rejoiced with the angels as we've read and re-read the biblical account of the birth of Jesus, our precious Lord and Saviour.

Christmas is a time of stories. And our family has one that's particularly meaningful to us.

The story I'm referring to began on a cold December night shortly after our kids had been tucked into bed. Glancing out the window, I noticed it had started snowing and I headed downstairs to tell our oldest son, Sean, to set his alarm. Sean had just received his first job from some neighbours down the street. He was responsible for clearing their sidewalk and driveway of snow before they left for work in the morning.

When I went into Sean's room he told me he was having a hard time falling asleep. Usually when this happens he reads for a while but on that particular night he didn't

have a book. Preoccupied with my unfinished Christmas shopping, I suggested he browse through the Sears catalogue and make note of a few things he would like to find under the tree. By the time I was closing his door behind me, he was deeply engrossed in the beginnings of a wish list.

I didn't know it at the time but as Sean was leafing through the catalogue he came across a hand-held electronic gaming device he instantly fell in love with. It was a PSP (Play Station Portable) – a teenage boy's dream. Unfortunately, it was priced at \$200. Sean knew his Dad and I wouldn't buy anything that expensive for him for Christmas so he started brainstorming ways to buy the PSP himself. He figured out how many months of allowance it would take to save up a couple of hundred dollars. He calculated how much snow he would have to shovel to earn that kind of money. But no matter how much thought he put into it, he knew there was no way he could pull it off. Finally, discouraged, he put the catalogue away, switched off the light, and turned his PSP predicament over to God in his nighttime prayer.

The next day Sean was out the door bright and early. I heard him leave the house quietly as I went about my morning chores. An

hour later he returned. This time his entrance woke up the entire family!

"I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" Sean was yelling as he dropped his shovel with a bang and barged through the back door. "I can't believe how much God loves me! I can't believe how quickly he answered my prayer! I can't believe it!"

It took a while to get the full story out of my excited son but eventually I was able to piece together a clear picture. When Sean had finished shovelling for the neighbours, the man of the house had come out to pay him. In his hand he had held a small black case. "I was in the hospital recently and some friends bought this for me to keep me occupied," he had told Sean. "I don't use it anymore and was wondering if you would like it?" He opened it up to show Sean what was inside – it was a PSP.

Sean was very excited to play his new gaming system. But he was even more excited to discover a God that cared so much for him that he took care of even his smallest needs (and wants). It made for a very special Christmas for our son. By getting



a small electronic gift from God he was able to appreciate the bigger gift God gave in the stable. He comprehended with utter certainty that God sent his son Jesus to the world for him personally.

During the holiday season the good news of Christmas is told in a variety of ways. For a 12-year-old boy in Edmonton the format was a small electronic device. Our Lord spoke to this teenager in a way he could understand. It astounds me every time I think of it. Glory to God in the highest!

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Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

Lasting beauty

I can easily amuse myself in a shopping mall or at the airport just by sitting on a bench and studying passersby (discreetly, of course). The way people walk, their posture, clothing, hairstyles, all provide clues to their personalities. Naturally the most revealing feature is a person's face.

While facial expressions such as joy, anger or surprise are engaging, they also change constantly. What really fascinates me is the default expression – the way a person looks when he or she thinks no one is watching. And the most intriguing faces of all are those which have been around the longest.

So years ago when I worked in the nursing home, one of the job perks was to be surrounded by a variety of intensely inter-

esting faces. Among my favourites were those elderly men and women who seemed to have survived life's rigours and emerged into old age with a consistently pleasant countenance. They had somehow weathered the storms and yet maintained a positive outlook. I fancied that someday I might be one of them, should the Lord bless me with longevity. But for all my clever scrutiny, one old lady taught me that true beauty can come in an unlikely package.

Vicarious pain

A scrawny little bird, Edith had thick white hair pulled tightly back into a bun. Her fraying black sweater hung loosely over a floral smock. Bulky support-hose bagged out at the knees of her chicken legs, and fluffy pink bedroom slippers gave her huge hobbit-like feet. Heavy lenses magnified her big blue eyes, and a steady grimace revealed a couple of missing teeth. Every aspect of her being conveyed one feeling – relentless pain. But in fact, she was in good physical shape.

The chronic pain she lived with belonged to her husband George. He

was confined to a wheelchair and rarely spoke. He suffered significantly and required strong medication every four hours. Like clockwork, fifteen minutes before his next painkiller was due, Edith would shuffle down the hallway in her pink slippers, hunting for the nurse in charge.

Some nurses resented her constant reminders. "It's almost time for George's pill," was all she ever said. And then she would return to the room they shared. Ten minutes later she would poke her head out the door and peer down the corridor. If no nurse was en route, she would traipse off to the nurses' desk, the report room, the staff lounge or wherever she could find a staff member to remind them about George. And this time she wouldn't leave unless accompanied by a nurse carrying her husband's meds.

Once a month she appeared in my office to pay for their room. She fished a worn cheque book out of an oversized handbag. Without speaking, she slid the cheque across my desk and I filled in the details. After studying what I had written, she signed the cheque with a shaky hand, tucked the receipt into her bag and left the room as silently as she had entered it, checking her watch as she walked out.

Positive example

Then one day George became deathly ill. Edith stood in the front hall and watched

the ambulance pull away. She returned to their room and came out only at mealtimes for several days. Finally word came that George had passed away. I wasn't the only staff member who figured Edith would do the same before long. She fooled us all.

When she came in to pay her rent I said, "I'm very sorry about your husband, Edith."

To my surprise she looked me in the eye and smiled. "Thank you," she said. "But I have a lot to be thankful for. We had nearly 62 years together." She leaned back in the chair, and I saw a woman I never knew existed. She told me of their years on the farm through the Great Depression and how her job as a night operator for the phone company saved them from foreclosure. Her visage was pain-free, and I realized that a truly beautiful woman had been in front of me all along without my knowing it.

I think of Edith these days. After almost a decade of coping with a herniated disk, Jack will finally see a surgeon this month. We're hoping for an operation in the near future. I'll accompany him to the consultation. If I have to, I'll chain myself to the doctor's desk until he gives us a reasonable date for surgery.

Edith would be proud.

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Kuyper

The Comforter (Part 1)

*And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Counselor
to be with you forever.*

John 14:16

A. Kuyper

This year, and every year, we celebrate Pentecost, the sacred commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Once more our hearts are revived and lifted up above the mundane ordinary events of earthly life when we hear the blessed sounds of praise for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who opposes the impure spirit of this age. We no longer wait for the Holy Spirit to be sent, but know he is here and provides us with an overflowing fountain of mercy and comfort to sustain us.

The anonymous Spirit

Those who tread the broad highway of this world cannot understand the Spirit nor do they know the joy he gives in our lives. They may know the Holy Spirit by name. He is like a mysterious apparition, whose presence never penetrates to their heart. They have heard of the tongues of fire, and people speaking in different languages, but they are not captivated by these signs because they do not know the One of whose coming these signs testify.

That's why those who travel the broad highways may well celebrate Pentecost, without really knowing the Holy Spirit himself. They may celebrate the day as a spring festival or make it a day to visit family and old friends, or they may take this day for enjoyment at home with their children and do not wish to dishonour this feast day of the Holy Spirit with overindulgence or intemperance.

Yet it was for such situations the Lord Jesus gave his warning concerning the Holy Spirit when he said, "the world cannot accept him, because it neither *sees* him, nor *knows* him" [Emphasis AK – John 14:17a]. Until the end of this age the *Holy Spirit* and the spirit of this *world* will remain opposites.

But not everyone will drift away with the spirit of worldliness. There are those, now and throughout the ages, who have divorced themselves from the world. It is not that they in arrogance cry out, "depart from me you evildoers because I am holier than you." Rather, it is because they have become afraid of the world, aware of its deadly influence and of the terrible power of temptation. They have shaken off the temptations of the world just as one shakes off a poisonous snake from the hand.

These are men and women walking on the path of the apostles of whom Jesus had said, "but *you* know him; for he lives with you, and will be in you" [John 14:17b]. Now, on this narrow road, they continue to live with many fears, for they still carry the desires of that world in the depth of their heart. They are dismayed because Jesus had told them that they would have the Holy Spirit living in their hearts, but when they "pulled their hand out of their cloak it was white with leprosy" [cf. 2 Kings 5:27] and the evil smell of death clung to it.

The undivided road

Indeed, that is the reality we face daily! Our reality is not divided between a wide road where all the godless sinners walk and a narrow road where the saints walk as if they were already angels. No, that is a fantasy. The real truth is that the thousands who travel through the wide gate appear to have found a lot in life that one could well envy, while the hundreds who travel through the narrow gate, and are indeed on the right road, still carry the yeast of the world within them and in the seams of their clothing.

This is the reason for the ups and downs, the contradictions and the strife in our soul. Where will these men and women find the anchor for their life? If there is no reward for it anyway, will they not wish to return to the wide road? "Curse God and die," as Job's wife said to him in his distress [Job 2:9].

By all that is holy, and by God's covenant which remains steadfast, they can't, and they do something different and better. For we find that in the midst of their sorrow they rejoice in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and even when all hope seemed to have evaporated, they still praise their divine Comforter.

The one true Comforter

So, what does it mean to say that the Holy Spirit is a Comforter? Does it mean that the Holy Spirit heals wounded hearts, encourages in sadness, restores from grief and upholds through all the bitter assaults on life?

To be sure, it *includes* all these. There is nothing that burdens our heart for which the Holy Spirit cannot give relief. No one who approaches him will ever be turned away empty-handed. Even when death enters our lives and takes away someone we considered indispensable, then it is not the spirit of this world, but the Holy Spirit from on high who needs to encourage us, refresh us and restore our hope.

It is the Holy Spirit who lifts us into a more inspired life, so that we do not feel deserted if a dear friend has gone before us. For the Holy Spirit allows us to experience a taste of heaven, so that even though we may be separated by death, the bond of communion is not fully severed. And the Holy Spirit corrects the selfishness of our hearts helping us discern that even those who are most dearly beloved do not belong to us, but that we live together with them in our calling before the Lord.

There is one thing about which there can be no doubt: only the *Holy Spirit* gives the truly divine balm of healing comfort for our broken hearts.

Whatever one seeks or promotes outside of him is no real cure, only a makeshift bandage to cover up a festering wound without healing it. It is no more than an opiate to make one forget his sorrow.

If those are not the cures we seek, if we want to live to the full, whatever burden the Lord has placed on us, if we want to drink the bitter dregs of the cup that the Lord has put in our hand, if we are willing to dive into the waves of our suffering, until we realize that now we truly have experienced it all, then we must also know that we *cannot* do this without the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Comfort in, not from

Even so, this is not the main cause nor the root of the joy given us by the Holy Spirit. If comfort in a time of trial were the only purpose for our thanksgiving and praise at Pentecost, then only the bereaved would be happy and the sorrowing be blessed. Then, Pentecost only for those frustrated and defeated in life.

But that is not the real reason for Pentecost! Pentecost



The Holy Spirit depicted as a dove above child Jesus, painting by Juan Simon Gutierrez (1643-1718).

is for all God's children. It has meaning for everyone, old and young, who know the Holy Spirit. Some at first have only heard of the Father, then hear about the Son, and only later begin to get to know God the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Comforter is understanding that those bereft of their possessions and those grieving over the loss of dear ones are not experiencing the worst of human suffering!

There are woes which strikes far more deeply. There is a suffering that eats into our souls far more deeply, like a cancer, and overcomes us like a storm threatening to drown us in all the waves and bellows as the Almighty passes over us. Such suffering can over-

whelm us even when we are surrounded by all our loved ones, and the heavens above remain blue and tranquil.

We are talking of the struggle of the soul, torn between life and death, between God and Satan, between hell and heaven. When this strife is recognized it can cast the soul into a bottomless pit of despair. In such a state the soul longs for the living God, for justice, even though it knows that justice alone cannot take the soul to God. It needs a miracle, the miracle of saving grace, and a gracious miracle of God's sovereign power.

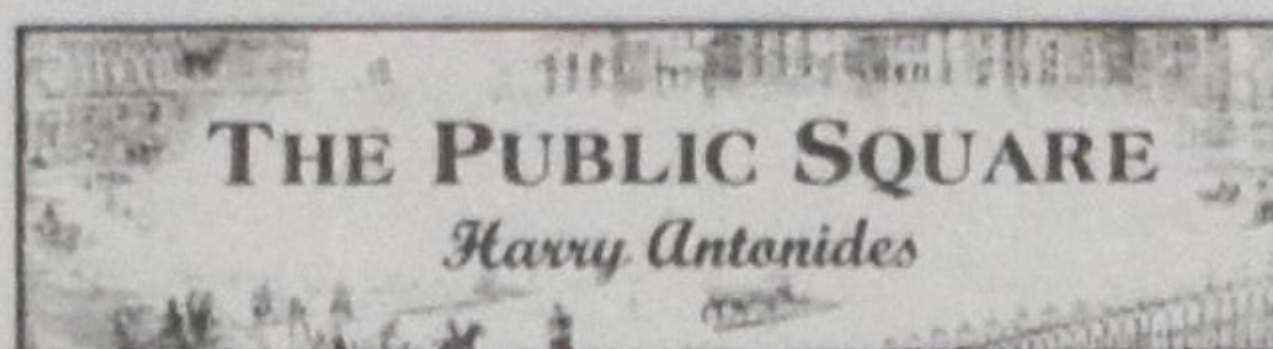
What would you feel if suddenly, fully conscious, you found yourself at death's door? Would the recognition of all your sins and godless living stare you in the face? And might the Lord your God hide himself from you at the very moment you need him most, because of the way your soul accused itself? Helpless, you would cry out like the murderer on the cross, "O God, have mercy on me, a sinner" [Luke 18:13]. Blessedly this is not a frequent scene at the deathbed of Christians. This is true first of all because at the time of death most have already lost the energy and spirit for conscious reflection on their lives; moreover, it pleases our God in his endless mercy to spare his children such terrifying agony at the time of death. But, even if such anxiety seldom occurs at the time of death, it can occur before we die. It can come to us whenever the Lord God challenges us and calls us to account, revealing the deepest needs of our souls.

He confronts us with the image of his Child, and our hearts must admit that there is hardly a trace of his likeness in us. Sometimes this struggle comes to us with a compelling and terrifying confrontation, one that overcomes and humiliates us in the middle of the night, or over the course of a few weeks. But the struggle is so intense that our memory of it stays with us for the rest of our life, reminding us how the Lord our God took us through fire and tempest and compelled us to finally realize that our lives belong to him, just like Jonah in the belly of the whale [Jonah 2:1]. Of course this does not happen to everyone.

Note: Part II will be in February 8 issue.

This meditation by Abraham Kuyper has been translated by Jack Van Meggelen (jack@vanmeggelen.ca).

Culture



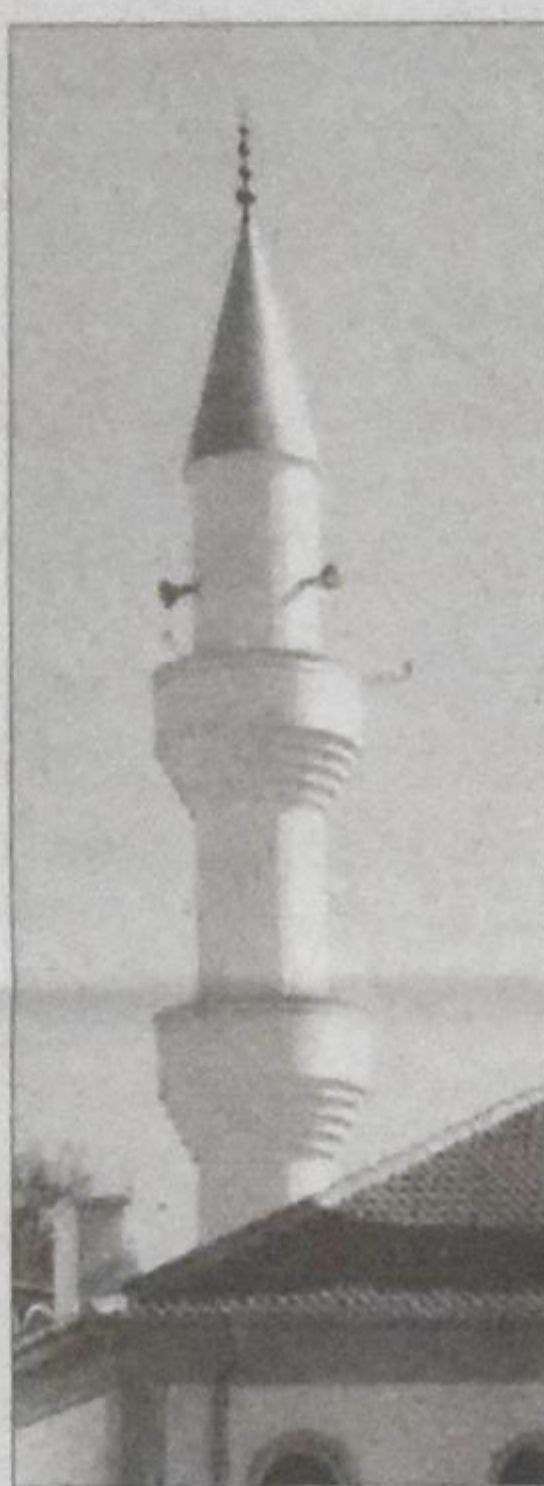
The Swiss say no to minarets

The shot recently fired by little Switzerland across the bow of the massive Islamic ship has created a storm of controversy. In early December 57.5 per cent of Swiss voters called for a ban on building any additional minarets – which are tower-like structures from which the Muslim faithful are called to their five daily prayers.

Even in Switzerland itself, many warned that this ban will antagonize Muslims and become an obstacle to their integration. Opponents lit candles in front of the parliament buildings in Bern with banners saying: “This is not my Switzerland.”

Le Temps, Geneva’s establishment newspaper, predicted that it will spectacularly damage Switzerland’s international standing. It charged that the vote was inspired by “fear, fantasies and ignorance.... Vengeance, boycotts, retaliation ... this clash with Islam could cost dearly.”

The French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said he was “scandalized” by the ban, which he perceives to be a form of oppression. Ironically, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy defended the Swiss. Writing in *Le Monde* he said that they acted out of fear about a loss of identity. Instead of condemning the Swiss, he wrote that we should “try to understand what they meant to express and what so many people in Europe feel, including people in France.”



Muslim response

The Muslim press was united in its condemnation of the Swiss. The 57-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said that the ban is an “example of growing anti-Islamic incitement in Europe by the extremist, anti-immigrant, xenophobic, racist ... politicians....”

Abdul Rahman Shaheen, of gulfnews.com, reported that several Saudi Islamic scholars interpret the Swiss action as more proof of Western antagonism towards Islam and a sign of a new hostile campaign against that religion. Shaikh Murshid Al Motairi, a noted Saudi preacher, advocated the launching of “a massive campaign to withdraw investments of Muslim countries from Swiss banks and halt going to Switzerland for holiday making.” Naif Al Otaibi, an imam in Riyadh, called for a boycott of Swiss products and financial services. (The volume of Arab investments in Swiss banks is reported to be more than \$400 billion.)

A statement of supremacy

The critics of the Swiss move against minarets argue that it is a violation of the Muslims’ freedom of religion, and that minarets are harmless expressions of the Islamic faith.

It must be remembered that this ban does

not affect the Swiss Muslims’ freedom to live their faith. Existing mosques in Switzerland with minarets will not be affected. What is especially galling is the hypocrisy of vocal Muslim leaders who in their own countries forbid any expression of religion other than Islam. No churches are allowed in sharia-ruled countries. Even to own a Bible is a crime, and to leave Islam carries the death sentence in a number of Muslim countries.

Yet these very same imams who issue fatwas against the infidels dare to lecture the Swiss about their alleged intolerance. Many mosque goers, even in the West, are taught to despise all non-Muslims. That’s how even in Canada and the U.S. young men decide to become terrorists, and fathers are led to kill their own daughters. Switzerland is now in the unenviable position that its ban on minarets may well make it a target of Islamist terrorists. (See Ross Douthat, NYT, Dec. 7, 2009).

Muslim hypocrisy

The fact is that minarets serve as symbols of Islamic supremacy. Here is a seminal statement made in 1998 by the current Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes are our helmets, the minarets are our swords, and the faithful are our army.”

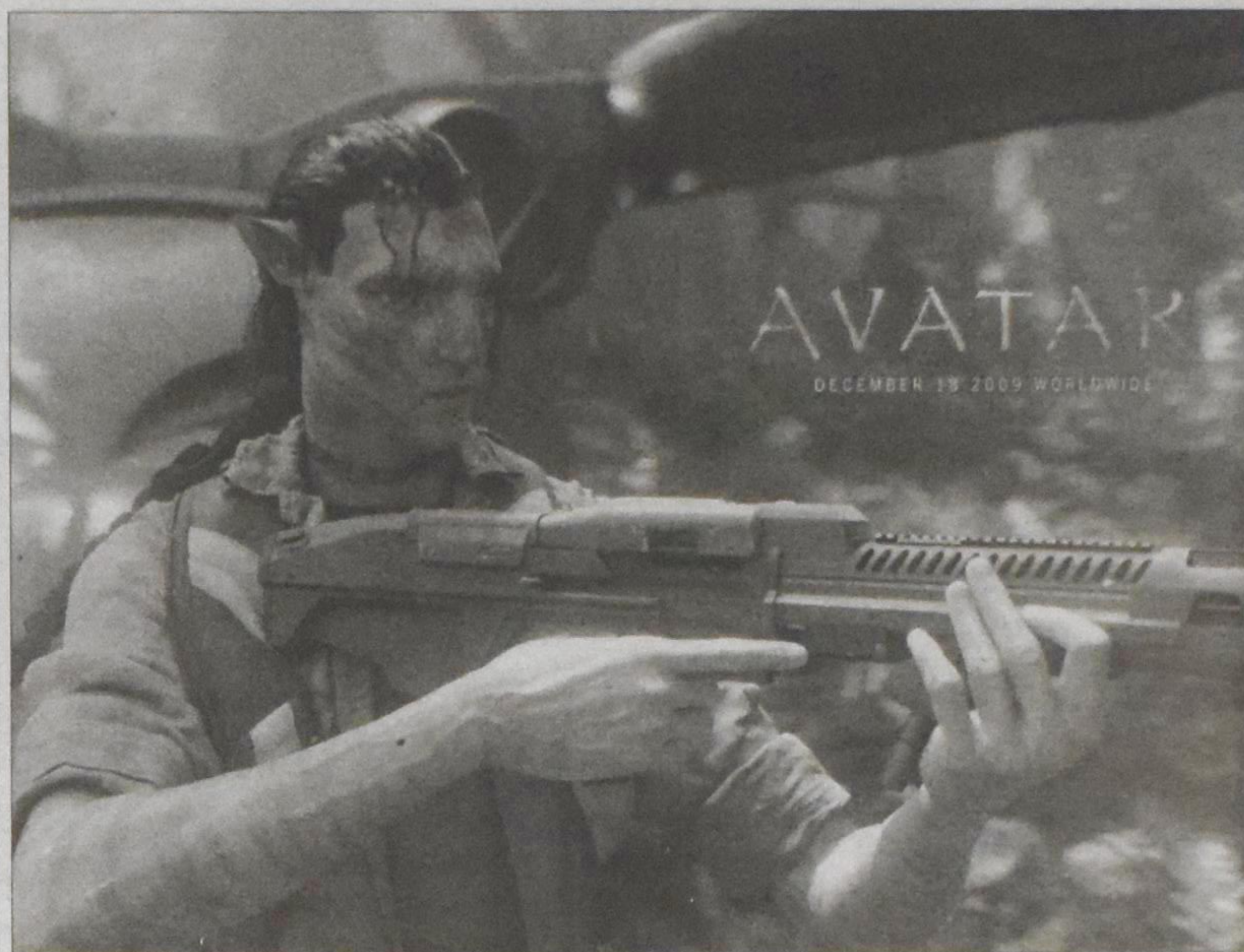
Barbara Kay got to the heart of the issue when she wrote in a posting on the Website of the *National Post*: *You will not find church steeples in Muslim countries. No other religious symbol would ever be allowed to challenge the dominance of Islam. Minarets in Western countries are meant as a statement of cultural challenge: They say in their own tangible and unavoidable way. ‘Islam is the religion you must literally look up to.’ The Swiss were right to nip this thorny flower in the bud.*

In 1938, Winston Churchill published *While England Slept*, in which he castigated the British for turning a blind eye to the Nazi monster while it was building a massive military machine that would soon lay waste most of Europe. Could such a book be written about our time? In fact, more that one has already appeared. Let me single out one, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*, written by a Jewish scholar going by the pen name Bat Ye’or. She does a superb job of shedding light on the true significance of tiny Switzerland’s message to the world.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Wiltondale, Ontario.



Have you seen your Avatar?



“The eyes are not responsible when the mind does the seeing.”

Publilius Syrus

This year, the number one question I heard people asking one another over the holidays wasn’t “What did you get for Christmas?” or “How did you spend New Years?” or “Does this knitted reindeer-sweater I got from my Oma make me look fat?” it was this:

“Have you seen *Avatar*?”

Avatar is director James Cameron’s latest big, boundary-pushing blockbuster movie. The story can best be described as *Dances With Wolves in Space* – a soldier is asked to wipe out a colony of natives but, instead, joins their side.

It’s not terribly original storytelling, but that’s not why people are asking the question, “Have you seen *Avatar*?”

This movie is a big deal. Just as Star Wars redefined special effects in the 1970s by turning toy spaceships into the real thing, *Avatar* takes computer-generated visual effects to a whole new level.

Human creators

The movie takes its title from the creatures used by the humans to interact with the aliens. Scientists on earth have created realistic-looking, flesh-and-blood alien puppets called “avatars,” which are remotely controlled by human operators. That way, when a human meets an alien, the alien sees what the human wants them to see – a ten-foot tall, blue, furry creature.

Pretty quickly, the main character loses himself in his avatar – becoming the living example of James 1:23-24: the man who looks at himself in a mirror and forgets what he looks like. He goes into the world believing he is someone – someTHING – else entirely.

Here’s where this movie is groundbreaking. The avatars and aliens are in the film

just as realistic as the humans. At one point I found myself wondering if a live-action actor was a CGI creation or not. I just couldn’t tell.

Image control

This is huge.

For years, filmmakers have been trying to create realistic humans using CGI. But try as they might, they haven’t been able to do so because of something called the “uncanny valley.”

The theory is that if you try to create life-like animated people – and get even one or two things slightly wrong – the eye registers the “uncanny” quality of the movement right away and rejects it. That’s why the people in the movie *Polar Express* are considered “creepy.”

But *Avatar* pushes right through that limitation and out the other side. After this, no one who goes to a movie theatre will be able to believe their eyes. Literally.

Now, this ability to tinker with images is nothing new.

Decades ago, experts used airbrushing to physically repaint images for magazines. In recent years, Photoshop has taken its place. The program is so commonplace and easy to use, it’s cropped up everywhere.

I can use Photoshop to shave 10 years or 10 pounds off my picture if I have to. I can also change the colours or manipulate the background fairly easily. A decade ago, only an expert would have been able to make those kinds of edits. Today, if you own a digital camera, the odds are good that you’ve shopped your pictures. And if you use Facebook or a dating site, it’s a virtual certainty that, at one time or another, you have manipulated your profile picture to look just a little bit younger, or slimmer, or better-lit.

You’ve manipulated your avatar. That, too, is huge.

Review

Modern slavery – An intolerable scourge

Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People by Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd & Alex Kent Williamson (Oneworld Publications, 2009)

Reviewed by
Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Slaves have never been considered human beings by their owners. Because of that, slave owners throughout history had publicly and shamelessly rationalized their rights to their “property.”

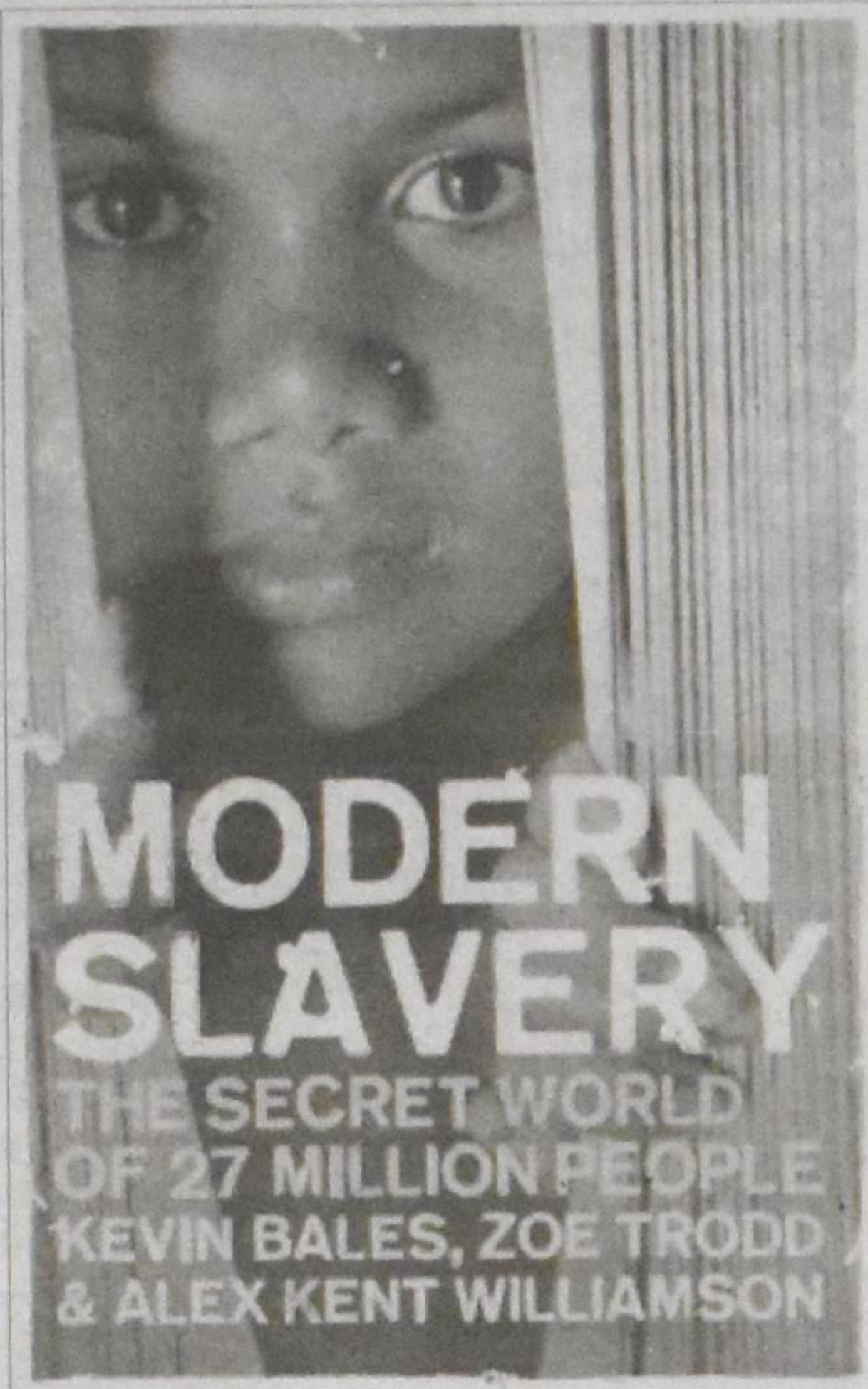
In 1807 and 1808, the British and Americans abolished the external slave trade. Since that time, other countries have also introduced anti-slavery legislation. Though commendable, the authors of *Modern Slavery* contend that “no matter how many laws were passed against it, slavery has never stopped” (page 18).

Instead of being abolished, “in the late twentieth century, slavery evolved into a modern form” (page 16). Though the public thought that slavery had disappeared because of its illegality, the exact opposite was true. Slavery “became hidden” and “moved into the shadows” (page 16).

New names for old evils

Slavery has been defined in different ways and been given various names throughout history. The authors quote Frederick Douglass, a former slave speaking in 1865, who eloquently said, “They would not call it slavery, but some other name. Slavery has been fruitful in giving itself names . . . and it will call itself by yet another name; and you and I and all of us had better wait and see what new form this old monster will assume, in what new skin this old snake will come forth” (page 26).

How does one define slavery in such a way that it includes its various manifestations? The authors begin by contrasting old



and new slavery. Old slavery had the following characteristics: it was not globalized; it claimed legal ownership; it established long-term relationships; it considered racial differences important; it demanded a high purchase cost; it accumulated low profits; it dealt with a shortage of slaves; and it maintained its slaves.

In contrast, new slavery has the following characteristics: it is globalized; it avoids legal and illegal ownership; it establishes short-term relationships; it doesn't consider racial differences as important; it demands a low purchase cost; it accumulates very high profits; it deals with a surplus of slaves; and it considers slaves disposable.

Why is it important to understand modern slavery and accurately define it? According to the authors, “a clear definition is essential



because slavery's variety of forms means that its underlying nature can be obscured. Both slaveholders and communities that turn a blind eye to slavery have numerous ways to conceal and justify this crime” (page 31). Understanding the universal characteristics of slavery, the authors hope, might “enable clear legislation and action” (page 32).

How did this happen?

Globalization is one of the key factors which has led to 27 million people being enslaved, but its existence alone could not have made that happen. How and why, the authors ask, did modern slavery become embedded in the global economy?

Three factors contributed to it. First, the population explosion after WWII meant that the market was inundated with potential slaves, and, as a result, slaves became cheap and disposable. Second, rampant poverty made millions vulnerable to enslavement as they desperately struggled to survive. Third, widespread government corruption often became “the linchpin of slavery” (page 59). The authors explain: “When extreme economic, social, and political vulnerability in one part of the population is matched by the ability of another part of the population to mobilize the means of violence and the ‘right’ to exercise it with impunity, the result

can be slavery” (pages 59-60).

The authors view slavery through the lens of gender and “find different vulnerabilities, impacts, and consequences for women” (pp. 83). Why are so many women enslaved? Several factors contribute to it. Poor women living in cultures that view them as secondary citizens are considered commodities, making them vulnerable to enslavement and human trafficking. Also, many are

excluded from the workforce. Even if they are employed, their choices are restricted to culturally acceptable female roles. Combined with these factors, many women have little or no opportunity to be educated, making them vulnerable to those who would take advantage of them. In cultures where violence against women is tolerated, many females have no protection against males who would enslave or traffic them.

Though painting a grim picture of modern slavery, the authors claim that “slavery is ripe for extinction. By ending it, we can achieve in our lifetimes something that makes landing on the moon seem a minor historical footnote” (page 145). In the book's final chapter, they outline how that can be accomplished.

Modern Slavery opened this reader's eyes to the extent of this intolerable scourge. Though the book's contents are deeply disturbing, Christians need to be informed about the suffering multitudes and pray for their release from captivity.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, ON. Her recently published children's picture book, *Monzi and Mama's Stories*, can be ordered at sonyavf55@hotmail.com



at sonyavf55@hotmail.com

Avatar continued from p. 14

What is reality?

I used to show media studies students a short, 30-second McDonald's commercial and ask them what they thought. Some students hated the commercial's jingle. Some would get hung up on the way the family looked or dressed.

Then I would ask the question: but is this commercial TRUE?

And I would get stunned silence. Because we don't think that way. If I write something completely false like “purple bats are known to perch on telephone wires,” you'll know it was false right away. But if I show you a photo of purple bats on a telephone wire, you won't necessarily question the image. If I ask you “Is that commercial true” – even though the hamburger, the family and the staff are all fake – the question doesn't make sense.

This is why, when my five-year-old sees other kids enjoying a toy in a TV commer-

cial, he wants it right away. And why, if he gets it, he is always disappointed. Because it wasn't real – and he didn't know.

Until now, the only thing standing in the way of total unreality has been our ability to detect fakery in moving images of each other. *Avatar* has changed that.

Out of touch with reality

So now what discernment will we use?

In a world of absolutely realistic and completely false moving images, how will we decide what is true? How will we train ourselves to see through a new kind of unreality? And most pressing of all . . . when unreality becomes more seductive and beautiful than our reality, how will we stay anchored to this world?

When we can make warfare cease, cities become green and pollution disappear with the click of a mouse in the unreal world, what incentive do we have to do the hard

work of cleaning up the real one?

When the image on the screen is of a person far more beautiful than anyone could possibly be, how will you feel about your spouse of 20 years?

And when – in seconds – you can adjust your own image to look younger, better and happier – will you forget who you are, and what you look like, too?

Or will you erase those worry lines the old fashioned way – through living a spiritually fulfilling life that transforms them into laugh lines? That turns sorrow into dancing?

Will you go into the world as a real, living, breathing, spiritual human being – warts and all?

Or will you be an avatar?

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) is a member of Rehoboth CRC in Bowmanville, Ontario.

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Classifieds

The Midwinter horn

A story from post-war Holland

(Translated from the Dutch magazine De Spiegel)

First Sunday of Advent, 1945

The inhabitants of the Holtkamp homestead sit quietly together for a while after the midday meal: the farmer, his wife, the two sons, the maid and the farmhand. For a while, after the closing prayer, their thoughts remain in church, where the pastor had preached such a moving sermon about the time of Advent – a time of expectation. Everyone is lost in his own thoughts. The men are smoking a pipe, and the women are quietly staring ahead. The silence is broken by the farmer's wife, when she asks, "Mina, would you mind putting on some water for tea?" These words also wake the men from their dreams, and Klaas, the eldest son actually continues a conversation they had earlier: "Soon we can blow the midwinter horn again.... It's different from last year." Everyone nods. Their thoughts go back to the first Advent Sunday of 1944.

Sunday the midwinter horn would be blown.

Just before darkness would fall, farmer Geerdink would begin. The surrounding farmers would in turn take up the call, as always. This way the Advent call would spread throughout the neighbourhood.

But the people had not counted on the fact that the Germans were aware of their practice. Had they been informed by Dutch traitors, or did they know because some German regions near the Dutch border upheld the same custom? The fact of the matter was that they knew that young men would blow the midwinter horn. And so collaborators were spread all over the region. No sooner had the young Geerdink raised the horn above the well and sounded the first notes, or the Landwacht (an organized and armed group of Dutch collaborators) captured him.

When the sound of the midwinter horn was so suddenly interrupted, other farmers in the neighbourhood sensed that something was wrong. They intuitively understood the real situation, and acted accordingly. The sounding of the midwinter horn did not take place after that. The people of Twente were disappointed, but none were as disappointed as the Germans, whose plans had been thwarted.

Young Geerdink ended up in Germany, however, where he was assigned to a workforce charged with the digging of fortification trenches. He did try to escape one time, but he was caught and transported to a concentration camp. After the liberation of the Netherlands, his wife received the news that her husband had died of pneumonia. She was left behind with two young children.

All of this goes through the minds of the inhabitants of the Holtkamp homestead on that first Advent Sunday one year later when Klaas makes the comment that things are different this year.

"Thank God," the old farmer says from the bottom of his heart, and he adds, "Take out the midwinter horn, Son, and do your best in a little while."

He doesn't say so much it, but everyone senses what he intends to express with these words: "Let the sound of the midwinter horn be a song of jubilation, out of gratitude to God who has turned all things to our good."



At that time the Germans were in charge in the Netherlands. With the help of collaborators they carried out a regime of terror that no one had expected and that many people had little understanding of at first. But soon, maybe too soon to suit the enemy, they saw through the Nazi's devilish game. They began to understand the sober reality of the work programme, the deportation of all the strong able-bodied men, so that the Germans could carry out their sinister plans. These rural folk resisted. No young male was to be seen in public. People organized a network of counter-espionage. This way, most people escaped the traps set up by the Nazis. Except for that one time.

It was the first Advent Sunday of 1944. The people of Twente, a region close to the German border, are attached to their traditional practices. Humanly speaking, nothing could make them neglect their customs, which had been handed down from father to son. Their healthy conservatism makes them stand with humble respect over against the rich traditions that earlier generations had built up and preserved. They take care with painful precision that the old ways remain. So it was normal that on the first Advent

During the time of Advent the farmers from Twente bring out the midwinter horn from the storage place where they kept it all year round. It's at dusk that the midwinter horn will let its sound be heard throughout the region. When the day slides unnoticed into evening, the widely spread-out farms surrounded by trees will hear the melancholy notes.

Where did this custom come from? What exactly is the meaning of it? From what time period did it originate? These are questions to which we have no answer. Nobody knows exactly, but it is clear that the farmers near the eastern border with Germany, as well as farmers across the border, take out their midwinter horn during the time of Advent each year.

The farmer from Twente prefers to make his own midwinter horn. He chooses a willow or birch branch, which he splits lengthwise and hollows out with great care. The end piece will be bent a little. The two sections will be bound and glued together. The mouthpiece is made from one-year-old elder wood.

The horn is blown above a well to deepen the sound. It takes place every evening between the first Sunday of Advent and the Three Kings Day (Epiphany, 12 days after Christmas). The haunting sound carries far, and those who have heard it will never forget it. After Epiphany, the horn will be stored away, usually hung in the well to keep it moist.

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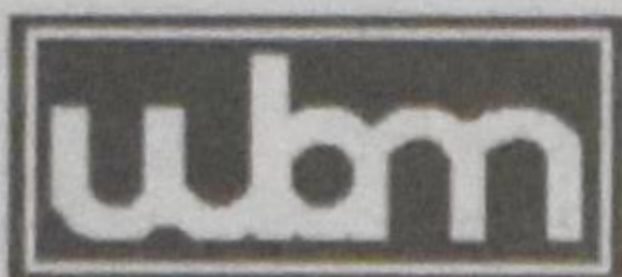
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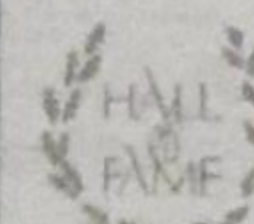
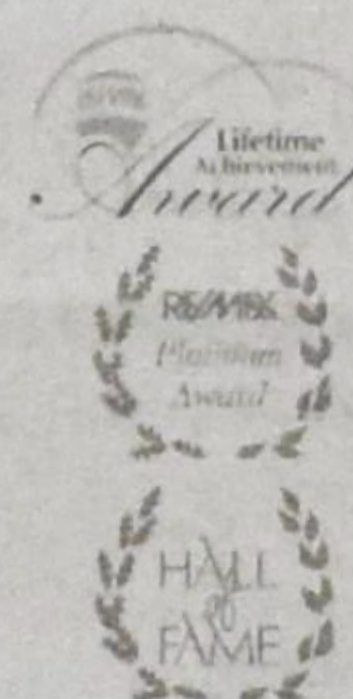
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jan 13 The World and our Calling Annual Lectures at Redeemer University College, **Ancaster**. Dr. James Payton, Jr. will be speaking on 'Calvin in Focus'. Invitation is open and admission is free. For more information contact Marlene Raddatz at 905.648.2131 X4414 or mraddatz@redeemer.ca

Jan. 24 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m.

June 26, 27 Come celebrate the 50th anniversary of HCCS (formerly Athens Christian School). Contact us at www.hccs.ca or 613 498 4176.



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1 tsp cinnamon
4 tbsp fine brown sugar

Sift the flour and add the salt. Follow the instructions on the packaged yeast, prepare and add it. Melt the butter, let it cool a bit and add it with the milk, ½ tsp cinnamon and 2 tbsp sugar to the flour and yeast. Knead into a supple dough and let it rise for an hour covered with a damp tea towel.

On the countertop, mix the remaining sugar and cinnamon. Roll the dough into pieces of 16 inches (40 centimeters) length. Roll these pieces through the sugar/cinnamon and form each roll into a snail's shell or turban shape. Put the buns on a buttered cookie sheet, pour over them the remaining sugar and cinnamon and bake them in a pre-heated oven at 225°C/440°F for about 45 minutes.



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ODDS AND TRENDS

Vanishing geniuses



After years of campaigning, parents and education groups have scored a point against Disney, owner of the Baby Einstein brand. The popular Baby Einstein DVDs feature classical music, simple shapes and animation, and claim to improve the cognitive development of pre-schoolers. The series has been tremendously successful, branching out in the late 90s to include Baby Einstein bath soap, toys and dishes.

Several groups of angry parents, however, argued that the products have not made their children noticeably smarter. The offended consumers cite the American Academy of Pediatrics, which recommends that children under two avoid all television, Baby Bach or not. In response to complaints, Disney dropped the word "educational" from its marketing three years ago, but that wasn't enough for critics.

Consequently, Disney is currently offering a full refund to anyone unsatisfied with a Baby Einstein DVD. (See babyeinstein.com for details – no receipt required – offer expires March 2010.)

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood is a group now pushing for Baby Einstein to change its name completely. Meanwhile, I saw a comedy last week that didn't make me laugh. Any chance of a refund, do you think?

Welcome to 2010

In February, Chinese will usher in the Year of the Tiger, signifying power, sensitivity and short tempers. All eyes will be on Vancouver for the start of the Winter Olympics.

In March, musicians will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Chopin.

In May, the six-month World Expo begins in Shanghai, China.

In June, Toronto, Ontario will be on the global map as Canada hosts a G20 summit.

In August, American combat troops will withdraw from Iraq.

In September, book lovers celebrate International Literacy Day.

In November, another G20 summit will be held, this time in Seoul, South Korea.

And finally, the jury is out on what to call the next ten years. Pre-millennium, we could refer easily to whole decades (the 80s, the 90s), but no one seemed to agree on what to call the naughts (2000-2009). And now, as we enter what some have dubbed "the awkward teen years," what's next? The tens? The twenty-tens? To disagree politely with the Bard, a decade's name by any other may not be as sweet. But perhaps we need retrospect to determine between swinging, roaring or lost.

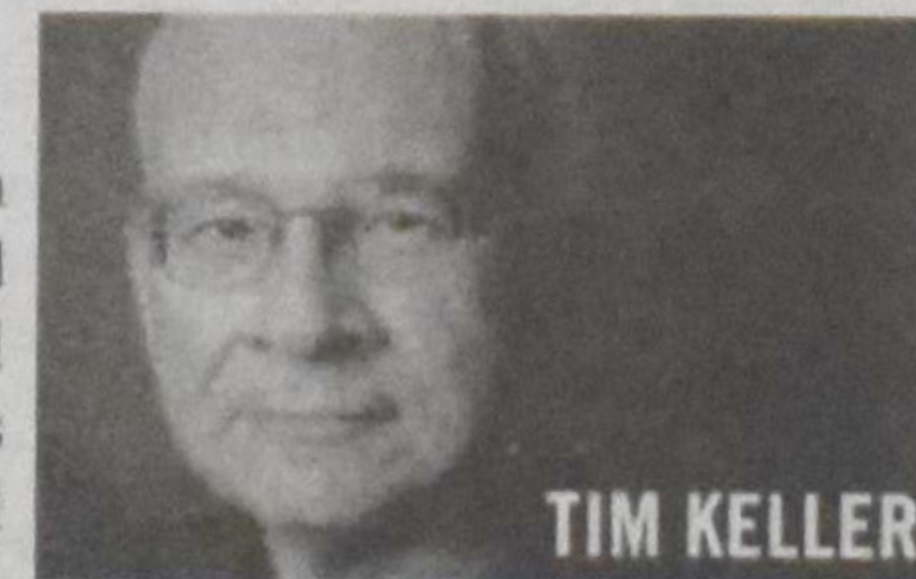
Those other Calvinists

About fifty American pastors in the Reformed heritage have pooled resources to create the Gospel Coalition, a body which meets regularly to discuss theological matters and to encourage and learn from one another. They also maintain a website that is a wonderful resource for anyone interested in current Reformed thought.

At thegospelcoalition.org you can sign up to receive regular posts from bloggers like Tim Challies and Ray Ortlund. The website has links to over 18,000 audio sermons by charismatic preachers such as John Piper, Mark Driscoll and Tim Keller. You can search through these sermons by name, topic, date or scripture. The site includes PDF versions of 300 articles, and links to 800 books, some (such as *Pilgrim's Progress*) available for free download.

As their mission statement says, "We are . . . willing to talk about anything while bringing everything to the test of Scripture and the non-negotiable gospel it promotes." Sounds like a good way to start the new year.

Angela Reitsma Bick



TIM KELLER

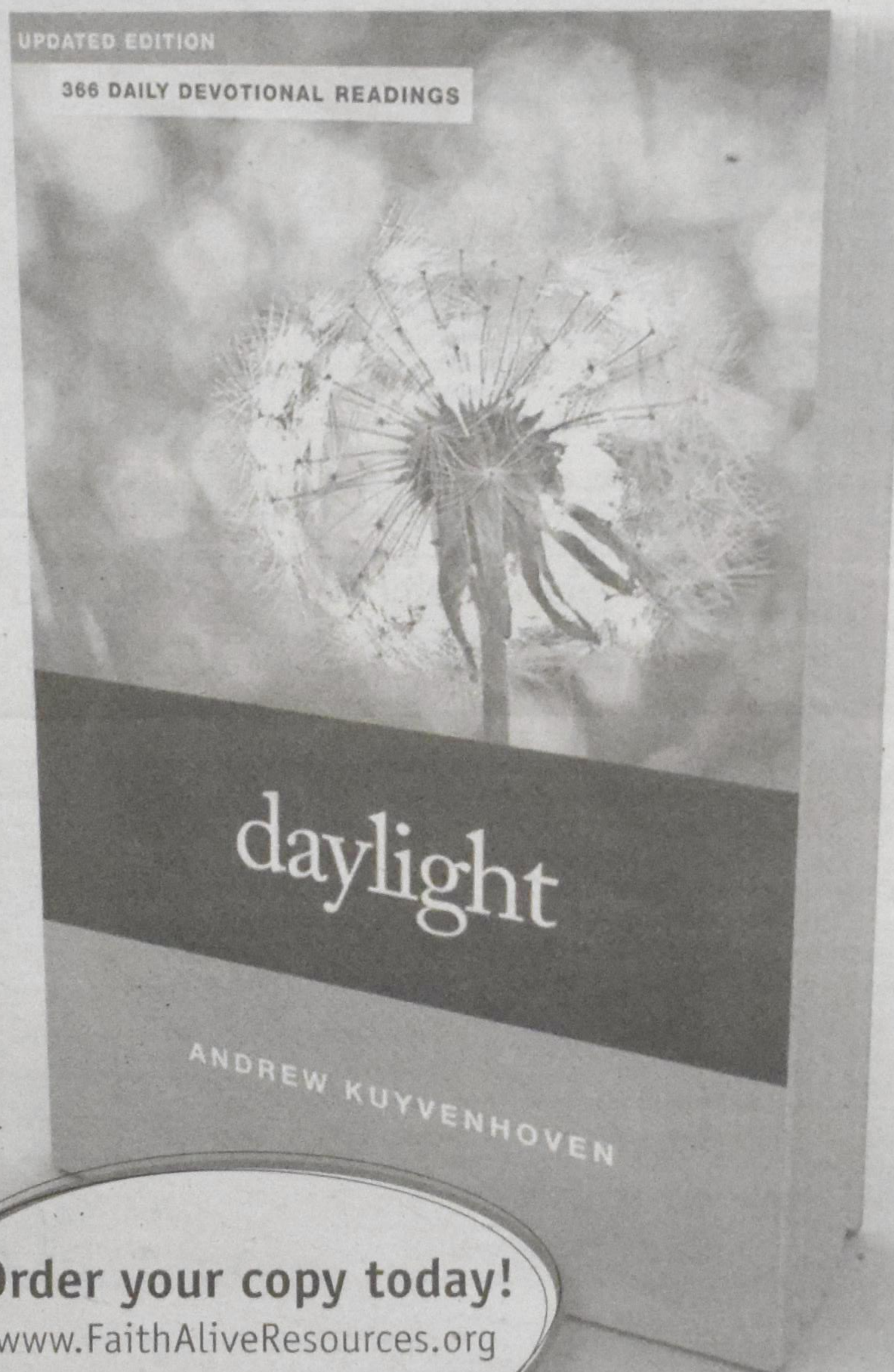
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